



100 ALL-TIME GREATEST COMICS

X-CLUSIVE
X-MEN CREATOR
SPEAKS OUT

from the makers of
SciFiNow

100 ALL-TIME GREATEST COMICS

Welcome to 100 All-Time Greatest Comics.

This book aims to take you through the best of the best when it comes to the world of the graphic novel. The industry has been thrust into the limelight in recent years, but is much more than simply superheroes in tights. In this book you will find some of your old favourites and perhaps discover something new.

Along the way you will be treated to some brilliantly informative interviews with the creators including an exclusive chat with writer Chris Claremont about his contribution to comics, a retrospective look at the work of Alan Moore, and discover how Kieron Gillen found his comic feet and explore how Captain America has stood the test of time. Enjoy the book!

100 ALL-TIME GREATEST COMICS

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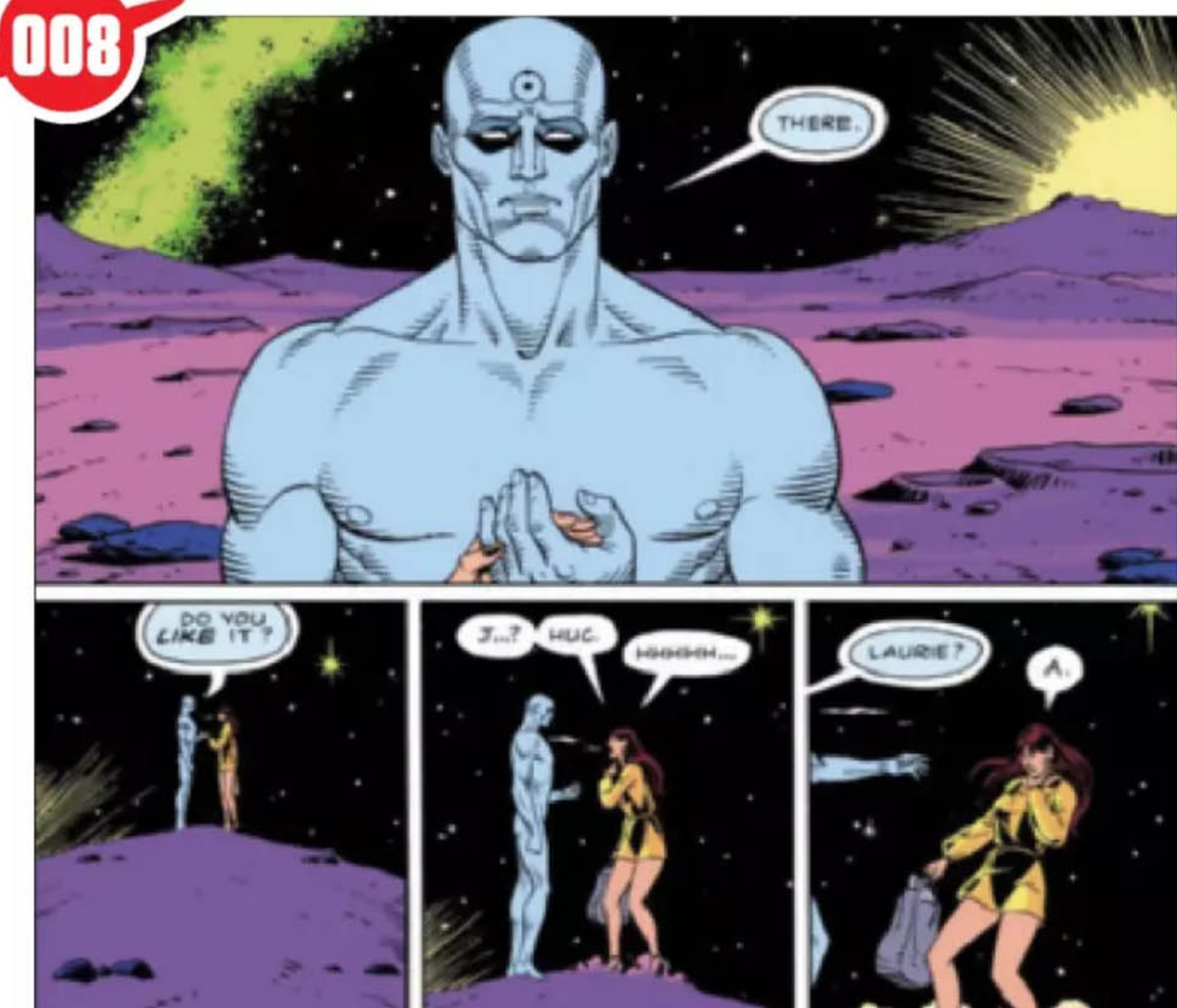
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WATCHMEN



ALAN MOORE
DAVE GIBBONS



WATCHMEN: VOL 1

Details Originally published Watchmen #1-#12 (1986-87) **Publisher** DC Comics **Writer** Alan Moore
Artist Dave Gibbons **Collected in** Watchmen **Available digitally** Kindle, Comixology

Watchmen is undoubtedly a product of the Eighties. The then-current fear of nuclear war looms large, and, politically, the series is rooted deeply in its time. But the moral dilemmas the series poses, and the seedy lives of the 'heroes', are fresh as daisies. To this day, it still makes modern superhero comics look dated and simplistic.

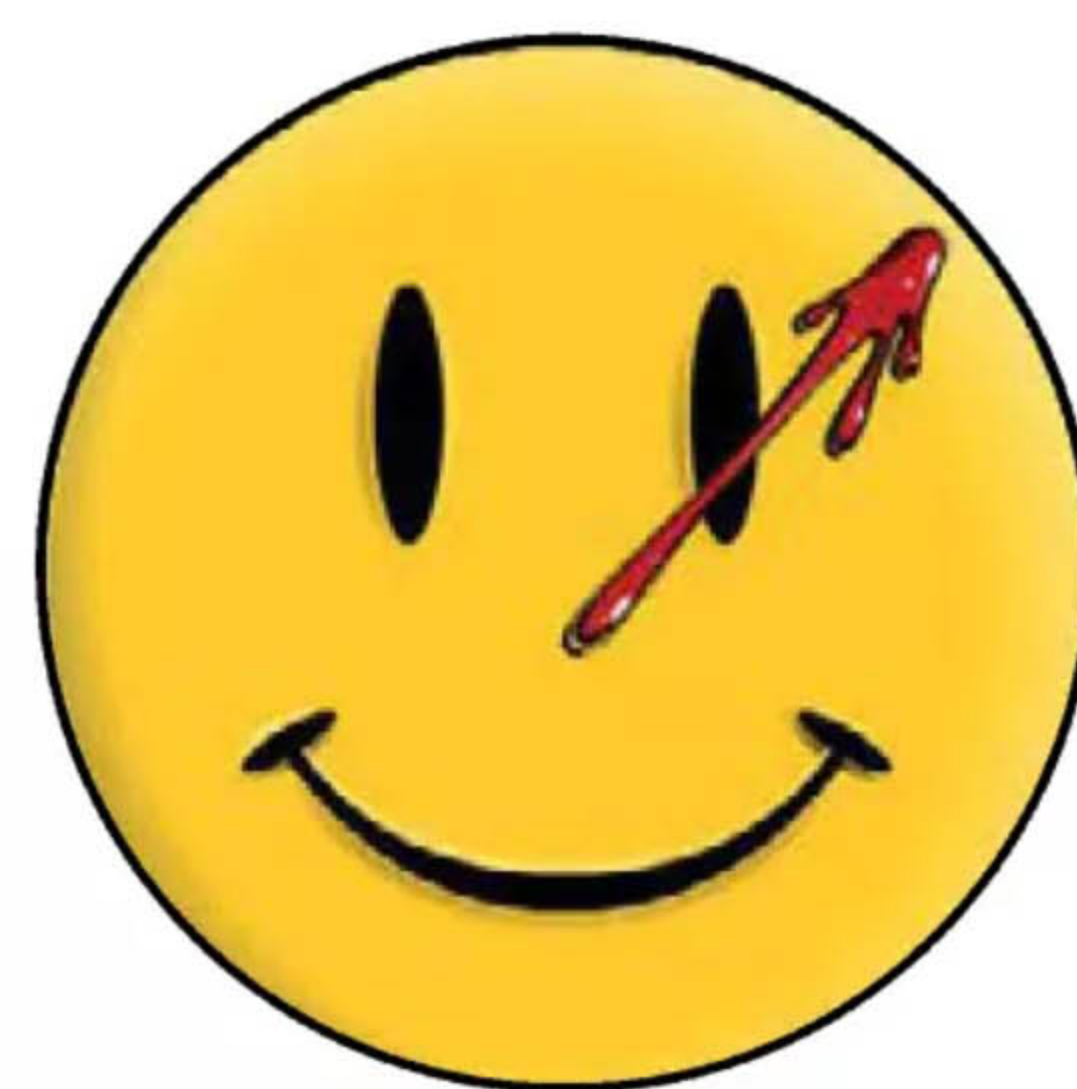
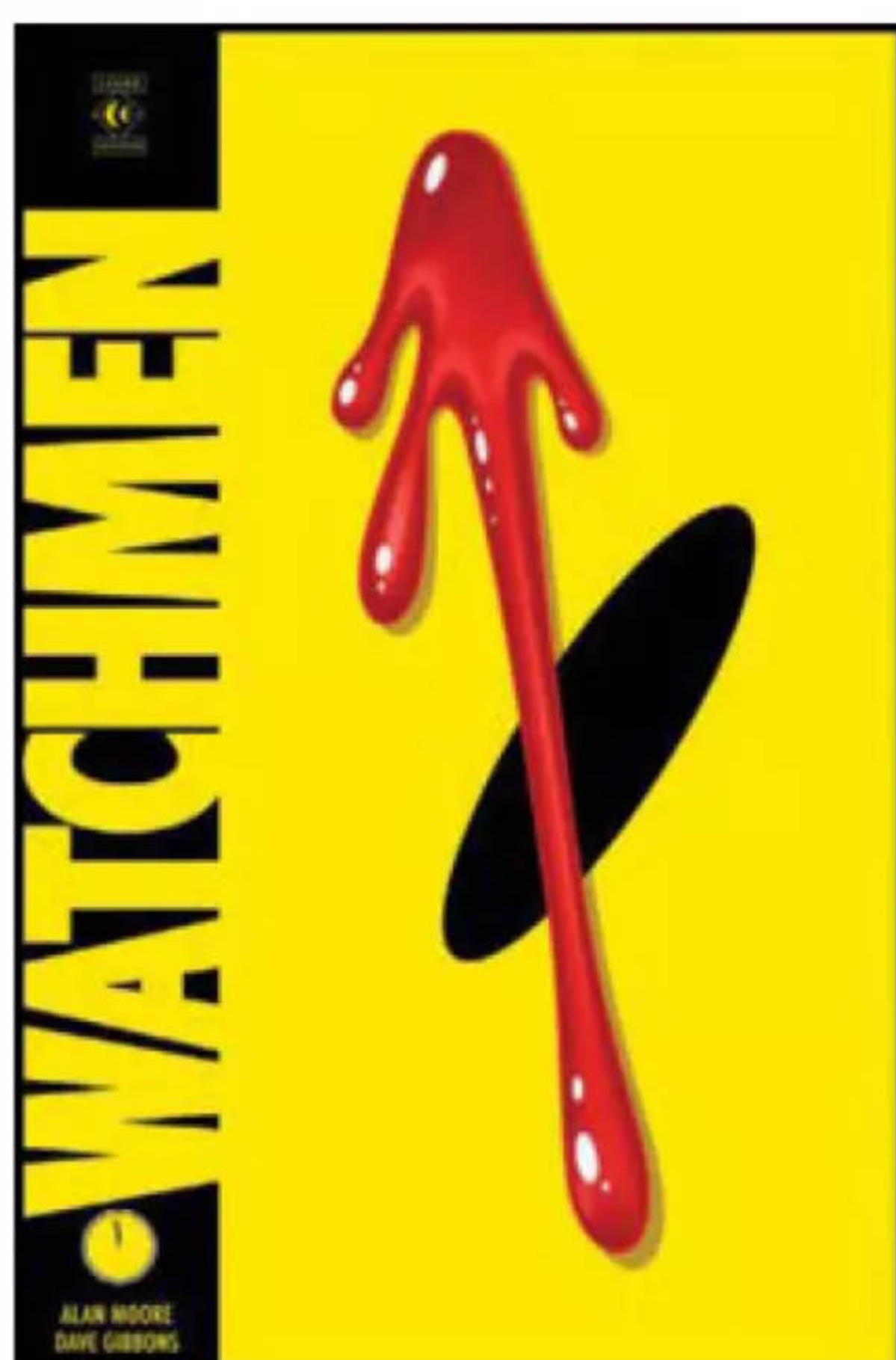
In retrospect, the series is overshadowed by that brilliantly unbeatable twist ending and the awful inevitability of the fall-out from it. It's easy to forget the well-executed soap opera of The Comedian, Sally and Laurie, or the sexual dysfunctions of the closest thing we have to a leading man, or the mind-bending omniscience of Dr Manhattan.

It's often a surprise to re-read it and be reminded that *Watchmen* is laugh-out-loud funny in places. Quite simply, Alan Moore applied realism to costumed heroes, and practically overnight the whole genre changed forever.



**"THE SERIES IS
OVERSHADOWED BY THAT
BRILLIANT TWIST ENDING"**





Alan Moore

Comics wizard Alan Moore talks about Watchmen's impact and the moment he knew that he had something revolutionary on his hands

In the mid-Eighties, comics changed.

Dramatically. Part of this was down to a classic superhero who surprised everyone by suddenly acting darker and more adult than he'd ever been before. Yet, at the same time, a vigorously bearded gentleman named Alan Moore, who had made quite a reputation for himself in the United States comics scene, was showing what comics could *really* do.

Alan Moore's *Watchmen* remains to this day one of the greatest comics to ever see print. A 12-part 400-page graphic novel, *Watchmen* was originally going to utilise a number of low-tier superhero characters owned by Charlton Comics, which had then recently been bought by DC Comics. What ultimately emerged was something genuinely revolutionary. A veritable masterpiece of comic book storytelling bearing a flawless structure, *Watchmen* was astounding and is still widely hailed by many as the best superhero story ever made.

Along with Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns*, it inspired – for better or worse – an entire genre of determinedly dark and gritty superhero comics but much more importantly, it elevated comics to the kind of critical attention that the medium had rarely, if ever, received. To date, *Watchmen* remains the only graphic novel to win a Hugo Award and was also the only graphic novel to appear on *Time* magazine's 2005 list of the 100 best English-language novels from 1923 to the present day.

However, Moore's relationship with what is arguably his signature work is a decidedly mixed

one. Certainly, he's immensely proud of the series and what it achieved, but thanks to standard industry contracts of the time, Moore's royalties were severely limited, which understandably left a profoundly bitter aftertaste. Moore's anger at the situation – disputes over which led to the permanent souring of his relationship with DC – is easy to understand when you consider just how much the publisher has benefited from the immensely successful *Watchmen*. The collected edition is currently on its 19th printing (excluding last year's best-selling hardcover edition) and the book provides DC with a not-inconsiderable degree of critical cachet.

It's been 20 years since Watchmen debuted. Looking back, did you anticipate the huge impact it has achieved since?

Yes and no. If you're asking did I anticipate before issue one that the book would have the impact it would, then no. No idea at all. As far as me and Dave Gibbons knew, we were embarking upon something that was perhaps a slightly darker, more ironic take on the superhero, a kind of outgrowth of some of the ideas that I'd already kicked around in *Marvelman*. Instead of *Marvelman* having one single character, we could do like a whole continuity of characters and apply the same kind of realistic sensibilities. But what we expected to get out of it was a slightly darker superhero comic.

When did you realise that you had something special on your hands?

Around about issue three. In fact, I could probably tell you which panel, that while I was writing issue three, I suddenly realised what we could do with *Watchmen* – we had somehow broken through in to a whole new possibility in the language of comics. By issue four, I knew that this was going to turn some heads. By the end of the series, I think at the time I actually said: "It will

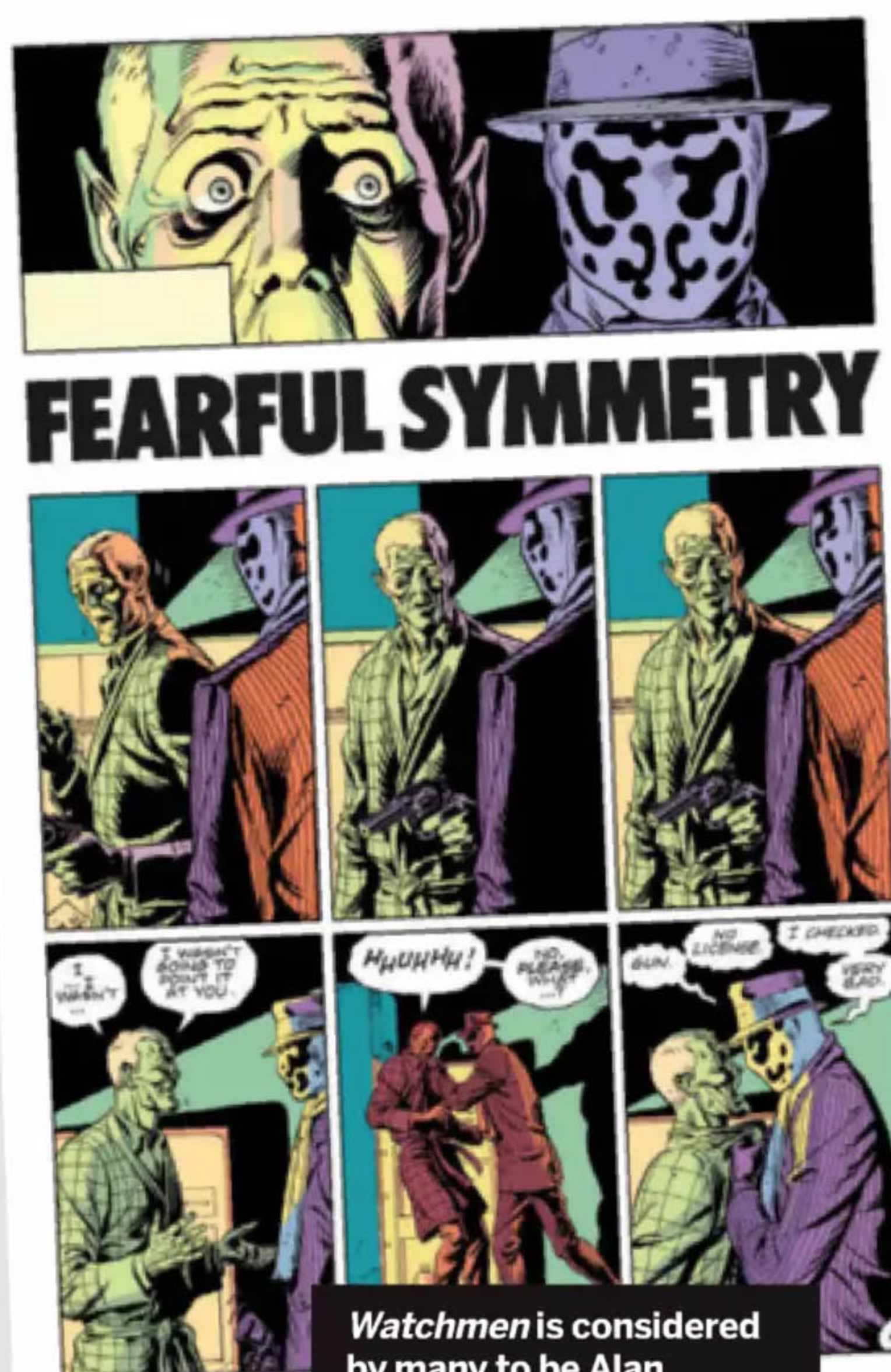
be a good 15 years before anyone comes up with anything to match this in terms of complexity".

Watchmen is also generally credited with taking the comics medium far closer to literary status than had ever been done before. What do you think made Watchmen different?

What made *Watchmen* work was the fact that I was trying to exploit the possibilities of comics as a medium. Comics are not literature and they are not film and they are not gallery art. They are something different. They have their own kind of language. That we could have the details in the back of the panels telling a whole backstory and we could use them to almost kind of program the reader with certain symbols that would evoke a certain set of associations or an emotional effect. We were able to juxtapose what was happening in the pictures and what was happening in the words to startling effect, here or there. Play with the time frame... do all of these things that you can't do in literature and you can't do in films. It was trying to come up with a language that was unique to comics.

Your scripts are incredibly dense with description – is that because you don't want to leave anything to chance, that you want everything to be just the way you perceive it?

Partly it's that. I don't mind if artists deviate or come up with a better idea than what I have put down in my elaborate script notes. All I want to do is give the greatest possible support. There is also an element that, when I first started in comics, it was very much a situation where I didn't know who was going to be drawing the script. It could be a great artist; it could be someone on their first job. So you tend to try to write, if you like, an 'artist-proof' script, where all the information they need is right there – you're not leaving it up to them to think of



Watchmen is considered by many to be Alan Moore's magnum opus.





AT MIDNIGHT, ALL THE AGENTS...



anything necessarily. So I did tend to evolve this thing where I did a complete script where I would talk about everything from camera angles to lighting to ambience to emotional atmosphere to the inner motivations of the character, what they are thinking, what expressions they have got on their faces – very, very thorough. I think that most artists tend to enjoy that.

Frank Miller once commented that, with Watchmen, you performed the autopsy on superheroes, while he got to perform the brass-band funeral with The Dark Knight Returns. Do you agree with that?

In a lot of instances you'll find *Watchmen* and *Dark Knight* grouped together, and this is because both came out of the same comic company at the same time. They both showed a darker vision of the superhero. I think that there is an essential big difference between them, though. At the time, when I was doing *Watchmen*, somewhere in my head I got this vainglorious notion that *Watchmen* would be the absolute deconstructionist last word on the superhero, and that somehow, mystically, after it had been published, all the superhero book publishers would, I don't know, turn to westerns or something like that, but it would be impossible to do superhero comics afterward – which was completely stupid and a completely misplaced hope. What you really got afterwards was a kind of more pretentious superhero comics, often with a lot more nasty, gratuitous violence. *Dark Knight* was certainly a grimmer picture of Batman, but if you look at the subtext of both books – in *Watchmen*, all of the characters are flawed in some way. There is no way that they work in terms of the conventional idea of the hero. Their presence is more of a problem for the world that they inhabit than any kind of ray of salvation or hope. With *Watchmen*, I was actually exploring the real-world ramifications of these characters and ideas. There was that big difference between what *Dark Knight* and *Watchmen*. They're two very different works.

Alongside the widespread acclaim that Watchmen and The Dark Knight Returns received, they are often accused of kick-starting the 'grim 'n' gritty' period that followed in the superhero genre, which was often done rather ham-fistedly. Do you think that was a regrettable element of the book's success?

I think it was me who first actually blamed *Watchmen* and *Dark Knight* for kick-starting that. At the time, I found it rather depressing. I felt that *Watchmen* in particular had a deleterious effect on the industry; there was all of this joyless grimness everywhere. *Watchmen* was actually not about grim superheroes. The only thing I was interested in *Watchmen* for, and the only thing I remain interested for, is the storytelling. The elaborate, crystalline story structure... the insanely detailed dove-tailing of imagery and words and I hoped that if people took anything from *Watchmen* it would be that. But, unfortunately, I guess it was easier to take Rorschach's brutality or the cynical, world-weary viewpoint.

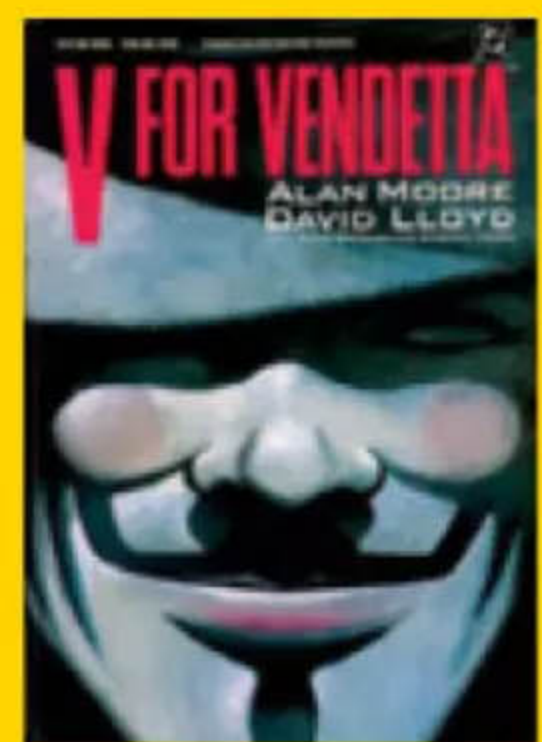
What are your feelings on the state of the superhero genre?

I think that there are some individual good works. Generally, I think it's completely dead in the water and exhausted. You'll get people like Warren Ellis who has a freshness to his imagination. On the other hand, you have someone like Mike Allred, doing his weird, nostalgic, demented vision of superheroes. For a while, I was getting 'The Big DC'... I think it was Garth Ennis who referred to it as 'The Big DC Bag of Shite'... but that's what we all call it now. I've got them to stop sending it to me recently as it was just so depressing. I don't even read Marvel Comics, but I'm assured that the situation is as bad there, if not worse.

Much has been made of Watchmen's apparent cinematic nature – do you agree with this?

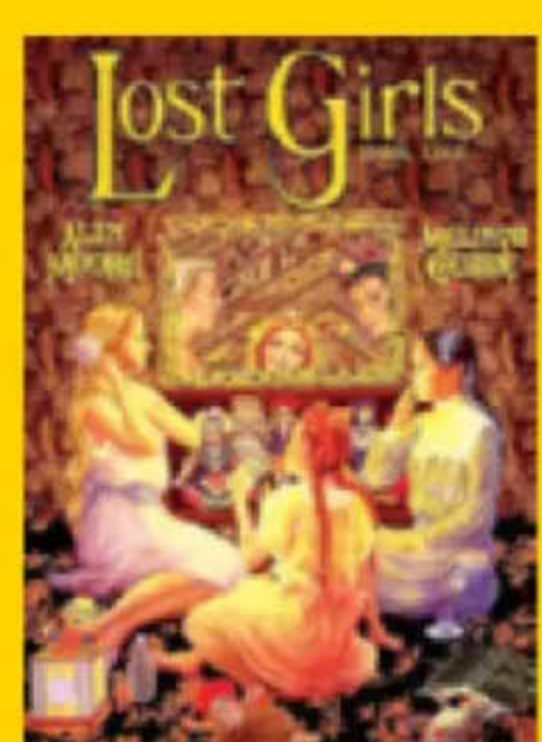
Most people looking at *Watchmen* who were unfamiliar with comics would evaluate it with something that they are familiar with – whether that be film, so you get people saying "Watchmen is very cinematic", when actually it's not. It's almost the exact opposite to cinematic. When I met with Terry Gilliam – who was at one point proposed to be the director of a *Watchmen* film – and he asked me how I would film it, I had to tell him that if anyone had asked me earlier, I would have told them that, frankly, I didn't think it was filmable. Because, I kind of designed it not to show off the similarities between cinema and comics, which *are* there, but, in my opinion are fairly unremarkable. It was to show off the things

MUST-READ MOORE The best of Moore's comics



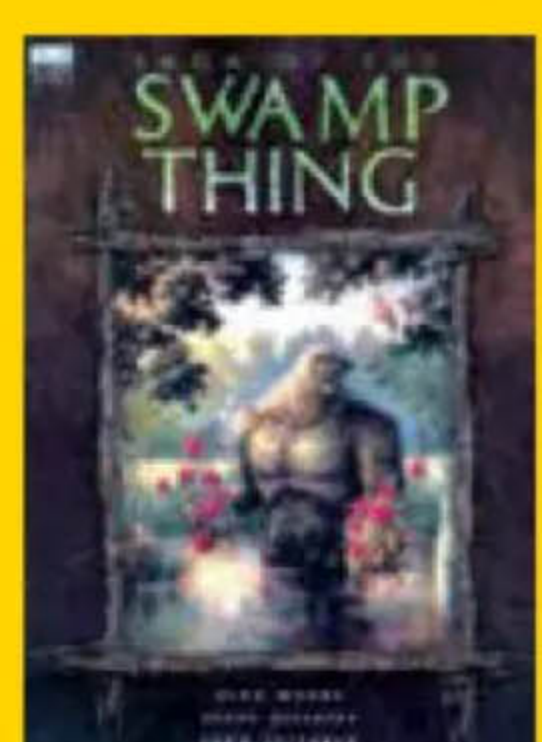
V FOR VENDETTA

A stark vision of a totalitarian Britain – gorgeously rendered by David Lloyd – Moore's passionate protest against Thatcherite ideals of greed, jingoism and anti-unionism remains one of his finest works, still potent 25 years on. The story of an anarchist terrorist's battles against a fascist UK government is also the first glimpse of Moore's massive potential.



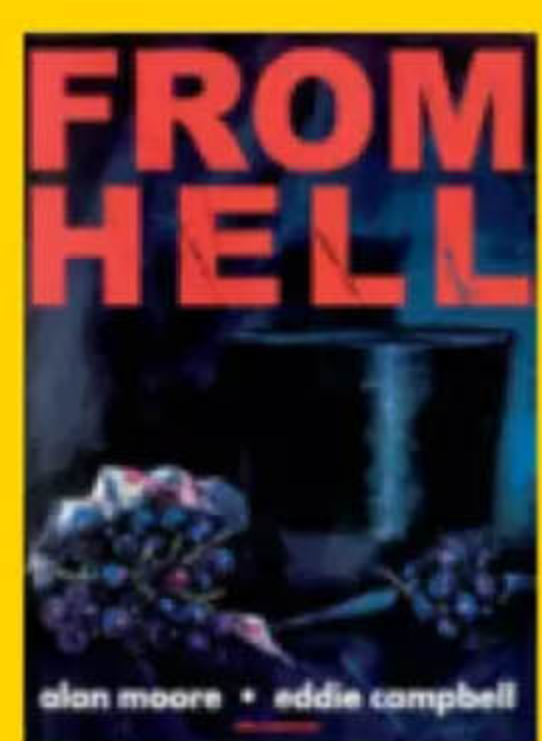
LOST GIRLS

Sixteen years in the making, this is Moore's unabashed paean to pornography – and utterly beautiful it is too. Despite the controversy-baiting premise – *Wonderland's* Alice, *Oz's* Dorothy and *Peter Pan's* Wendy meet in Austria and engage in a vast sexual imbroglio – Moore treats his subject with affection, sincerity and sensitivity. One of his most personal works.



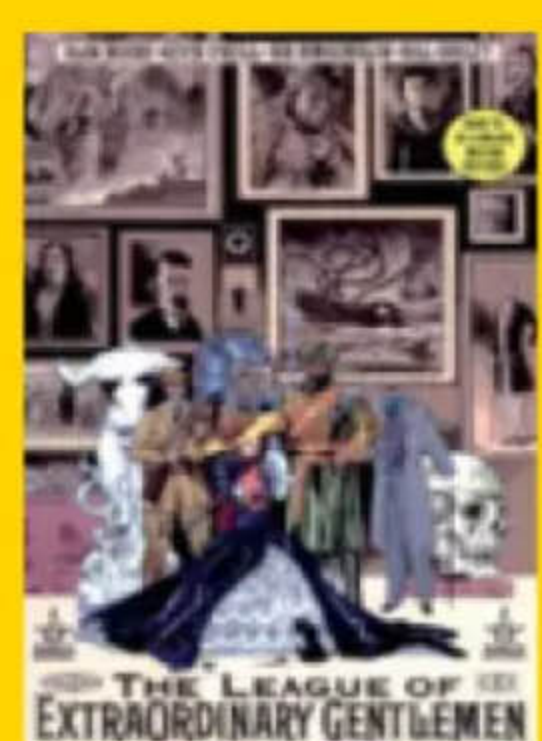
SWAMP THING

The series that introduced Moore to the US market. He was on pioneering form, deconstructing and re-imagining a then-formulaic character, infusing the series with an intense strain of urban horror that at the time was truly startling. DC Comics' entire mature-readers oeuvre can be traced back to Moore's work here.



FROM HELL

The chief rival to *Watchmen* for the title of Moore's very best work, this fictionalised assessment of the Jack The Ripper murders is a breathtaking accomplishment – dense, multilayered and immensely detailed. Deeply compelling and oddly beautiful, Moore confronts his subject head on, especially in the unflinchingly graphic rendition of Mary Kelly's death.



THE LEAGUE OF EXTRAORDINARY GENTLEMEN

Even the overwhelmingly poor quality of the 2003 film version cannot reduce the sheer greatness of the source comic, drawn by Kevin O'Neill, that was the crown jewel in Moore's 'America's Best Comics' imprint. Its marvellously simple and captivating premise – the Victorian adventure fiction characters operating in a 'super-group' – ensured that it was a massive hit.

ALAN MOORE: THE SCORE Moore info

// Born 18 November, 1953
 // Aged 17, Moore is kicked out of school for dealing LSD.
 // Moore spends the next several years in menial jobs before embarking on a career as a cartoonist in the late Seventies, producing strips for *Sounds* magazine under the name Curt Vile.
 // Eventually concentrating on writing, Moore provides work for *Marvel UK*, *Warrior* and *2000AD*, producing such celebrated work as *Captain Britain*, *Marvelman*, *V For Vendetta*, *The Ballad Of Halo Jones* and *D.R. & Quinch*.
 // 1983: Enters the US industry with pioneering work on DC Comics' *Swamp Thing*.
 // 1986-1987: *Watchmen* released in the US, which cements Moore's superstar reputation.
 // Dissatisfied with creator's lack of rights, Moore withdraws from the mainstream industry in the late Eighties, preferring to align with small, indie publishers. Here, he starts two major projects that would not be completed for many years: *From Hell* and *Lost Girls*.

// 1989: Moore's *V For Vendetta*, originally published in *Warrior* comic (but never completed), is published in a collected edition.
 // 1993: Moore returns to the mainstream writing an issue of Todd McFarlane's best-selling *Spawn* for Image Comics. He stays with Image, writing the series *Supreme*, *Youngblood* and *Glory*.
 // 1998: *From Hell*, Moore's metaphysical assessment of Jack The Ripper is finally published in its complete form. It is widely considered one of Moore's best works.
 // 1999: Moore sets up the 'America's Best Comics' imprint with Jim Lee's Wildstorm Comics (later bought by DC). Moore's output becomes prolific, writing *Tom Strong*, *Promethea*, *Tomorrow Stories*, *League Of Extraordinary Gentlemen* and *Top 10*.
 // 2006: After 16 years and numerous publishers, the pornographic *Lost Girls* is finally released in the USA to remarkably little controversy. Thanks to copyright issues over *Peter Pan*, the book will hit UK stores on 1 Jan 2008.



Twenty years on and *Watchmen* has lost none of its appeal.



The alchemists used to have these two principles that they could more or less divide the entire universe up in to, and these were referred to as 'Solve et Coagula'. 'Solve' is to take something apart and examine it – it's analysis. 'Coagula' is to put it back together again – synthesis. Analysis and synthesis... Solve et Coagula... and to some degree, the analysis, this is deconstructionism. This is what we were doing with *Watchmen*. I remember when I was a child, and there would be old wristwatches that had been abandoned and left in the sideboard drawer, and if you got permission from your Mum and Dad, you could perhaps get an old screwdriver and start to take them apart, take all the little cogs out, which is why that perhaps turns up as a motif in the Dr Manhattan stuff in *Watchmen*. It's very easy to take things apart, even if you do it in an elaborate way, like *Watchmen*. Taking apart the conceptual apparatus of the superhero... it's not exactly rocket science... but putting it all back together again in a more benign and more transcendent form that works – a more flexible form, a better, improved form – that is something which is a little bit more tricky.

For you, where does *Watchmen* rank in your comics work?

Watchmen will always be very special to me because it was a real breakthrough in terms of technique. It was really quite ground-breaking – there was a range of techniques that Dave and I developed specifically for the book – but by the time I finished *Watchmen*, they already felt like a cliché to me. It has a lot of emotional depth that I was extremely pleased with. I love the convolution of *Watchmen* – it is a lovely Swiss watch piece. 🕒

that comics could do that cinema couldn't, and to show off the things that comics could do that literature couldn't.

Warren Ellis has asserted that comics is one of the last places where you can have a soapbox to rant upon about things that are relatively free

of constraint. It could be said there are elements of that in *Watchmen*. Do you agree?

Certainly. I was a lot younger then and a lot 'rantier'. With *Watchmen*, I was able to use the hero icons to play a kind of chess game, where I could consider ideas of absolute power, in an abstract sense, but embodied in these big characters. What marks my work these days is that I feel less inclined to preach in the same way that I did then. That's not to say that I don't deal with issues that don't concern me. I don't always feel that they are best expressed in a superhero comic.

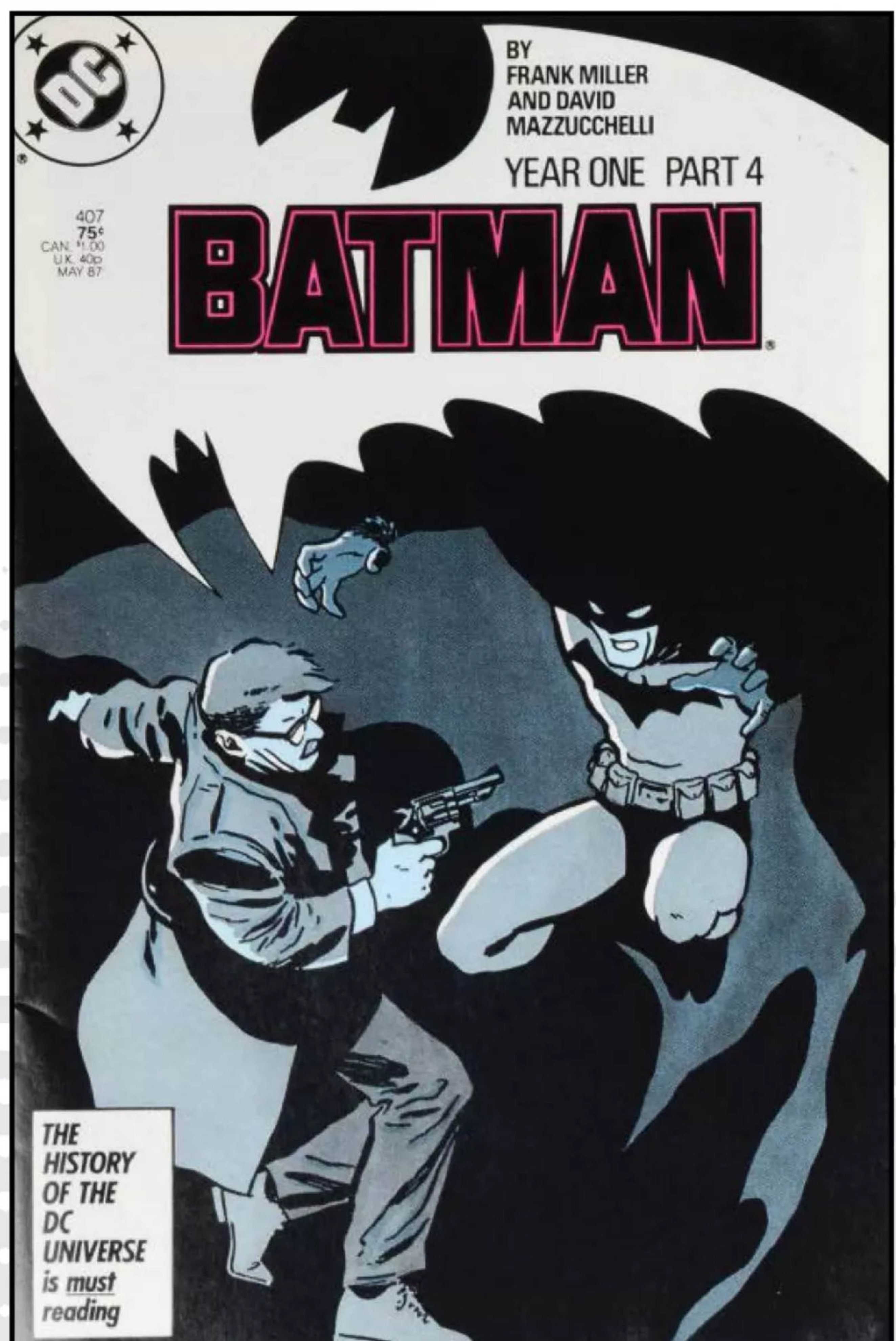
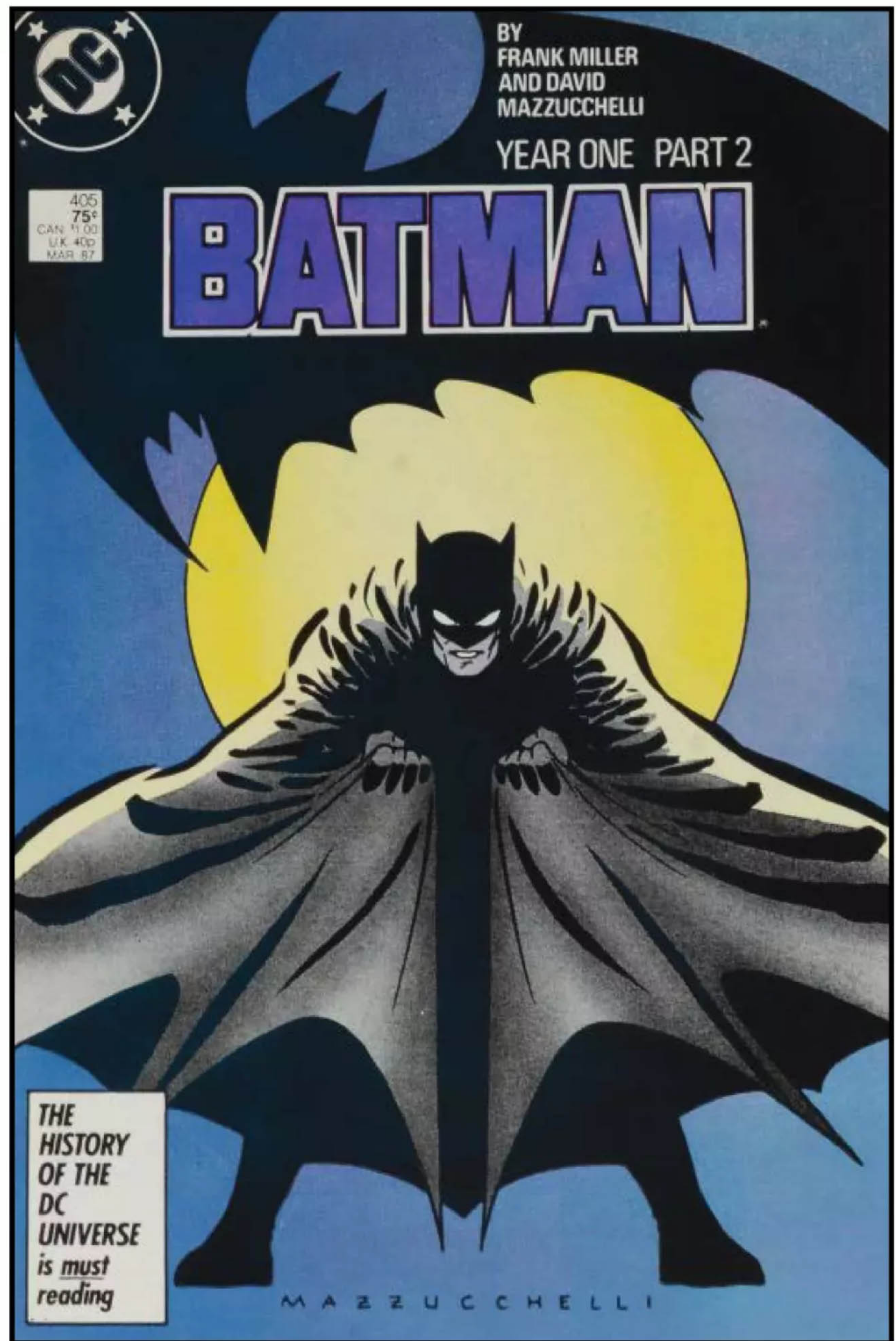
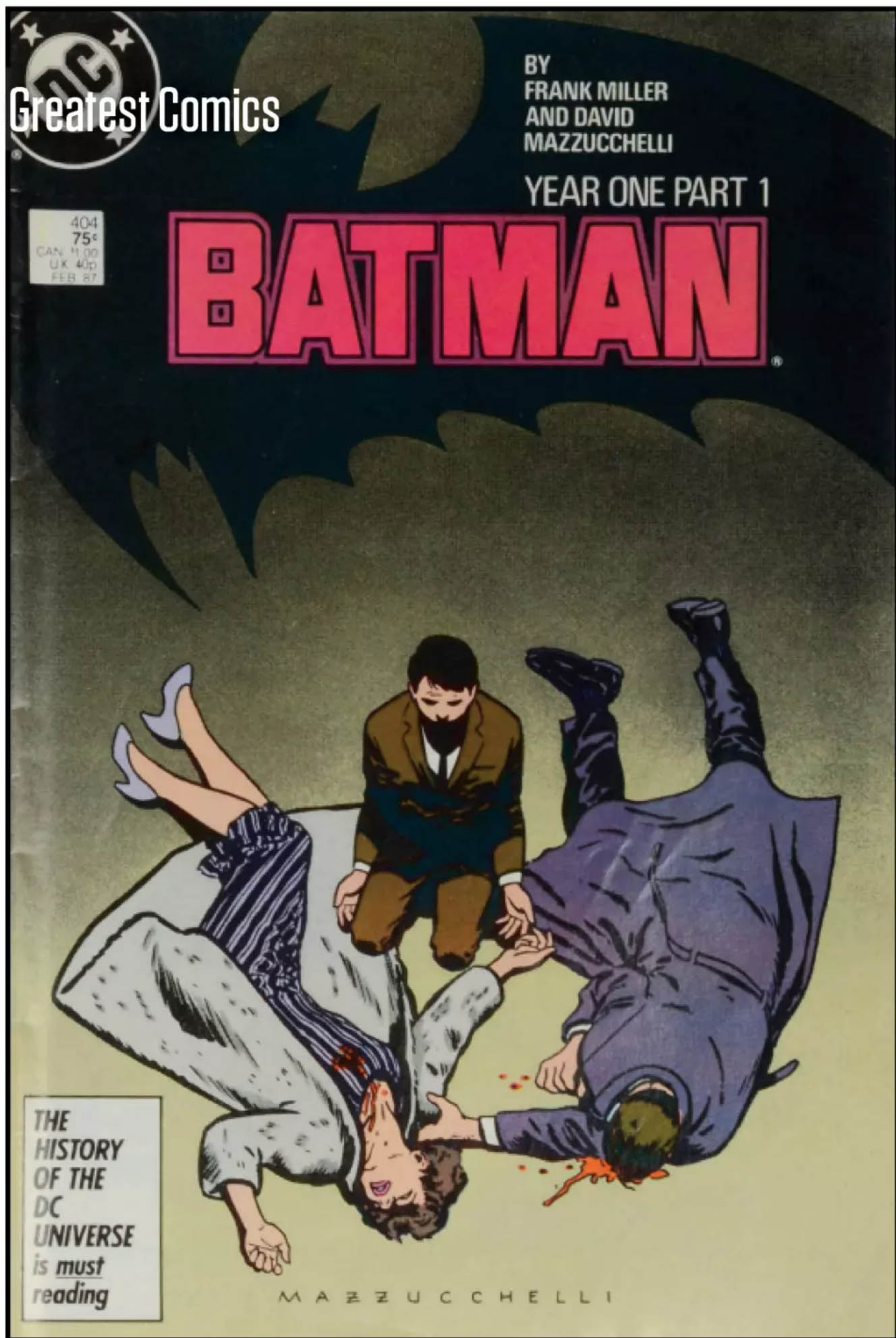
***Watchmen* spearheaded the sudden popularity of 'graphic novels', but that surge ultimately failed to sustain itself. Why do you think this was?**

After *Watchmen*, one of the things I deplored most about the comics industry was that everything was in the hands of the marketing people, who, very often, had no idea of the comics industry at all... they'd just been marketing people for another company and got a job with a comics company and then would be bringing in their half-arsed ideas. When comics in the mid-Eighties seemed as if they had finally reached their Xanadu, we were getting attention from outside the medium, where comics actually looked like becoming an actual cultural phenomenon that would be enjoyed by everybody. What happened was that the marketing department saw it as a marketing opportunity, not a creative opportunity. So, after *Dark Knight*, *Watchmen*, and things that were worthy of serious attention, you've got this flood of so-called graphic novels that were just big, expensive comics. They completely devalued the entire medium.

Following such widespread deconstruction of the genre, do you think the time is right now to rediscover the magic of the superhero genre?

The tone of the piece perfectly suited Dave Gibbons' art.



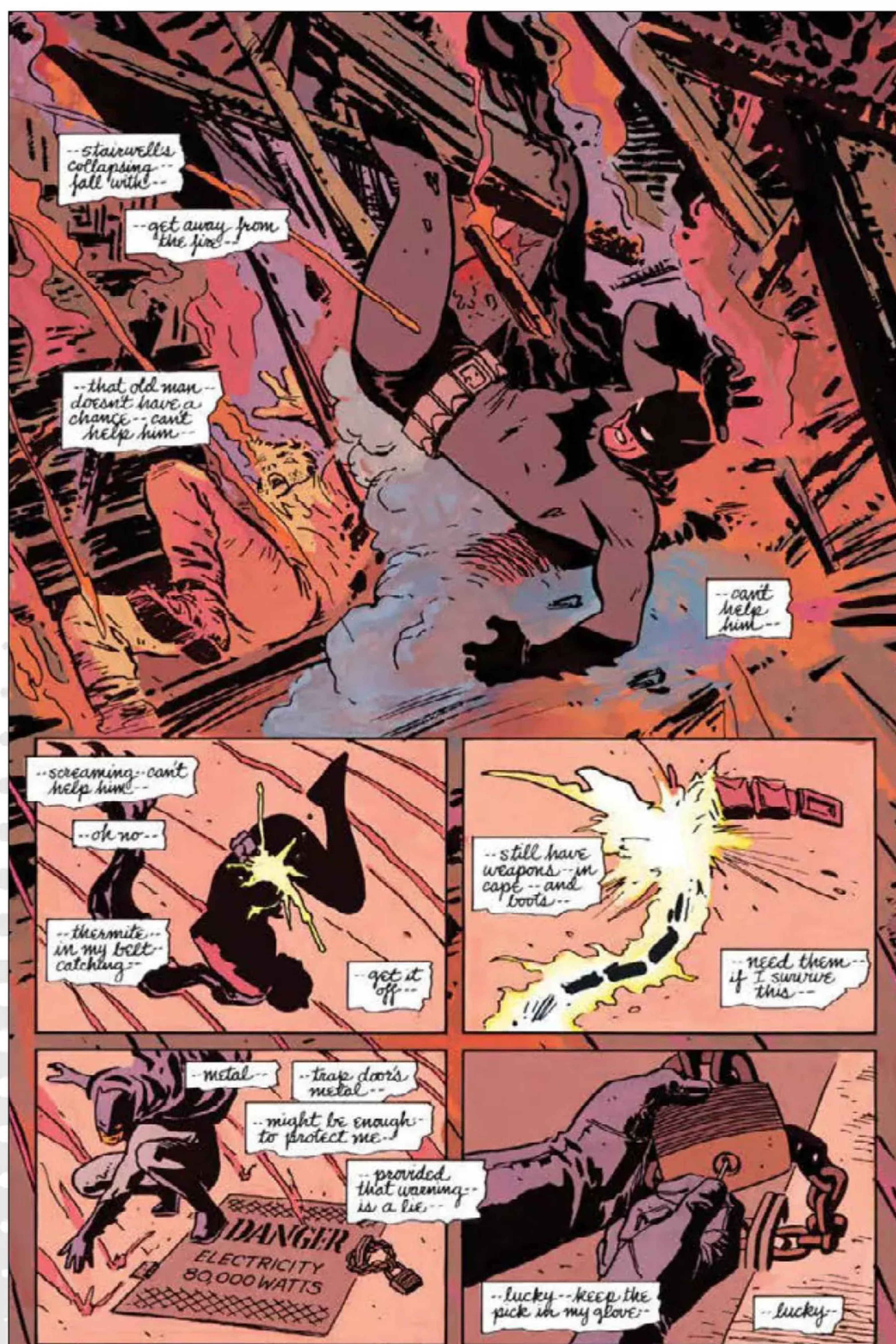


BATMAN: YEAR ONE

Details Originally published Batman #404-#407 (1987) **Publisher** DC **Writer** Frank Miller **Artist** David Mazzucchelli
Collected in Batman: Year One **Available digitally** Comixology, Kindle Fire

If you're looking for the single story that turned Batman into the character you'd recognise today, this is it. It's the retelling of the start of Caped Crusader's career, told in parallel to Jim Gordon's arrival at the Gotham City Police Department. It provides an introduction to what are now considered major elements of Batman lore (and which Christopher Nolan drew on heavily), and was the first comic to really bring Gordon to the level of prominence that he now enjoys.

In fact, *Year One* is really Jim Gordon's series. Yes, we see Bruce Wayne in training, learning how to take out entire SWAT teams at one time and bring down mob bosses, but there's something heart-swellingly heroic in Gordon's quest to root out police corruption without the aid of expensive gadgets and fancy suits. *Batman: Year One* is basically the origin story of one of the greatest comic book friendships in history.



AKIRA: TETSUO

Details Originally published Akira: Vol 1 (1984)

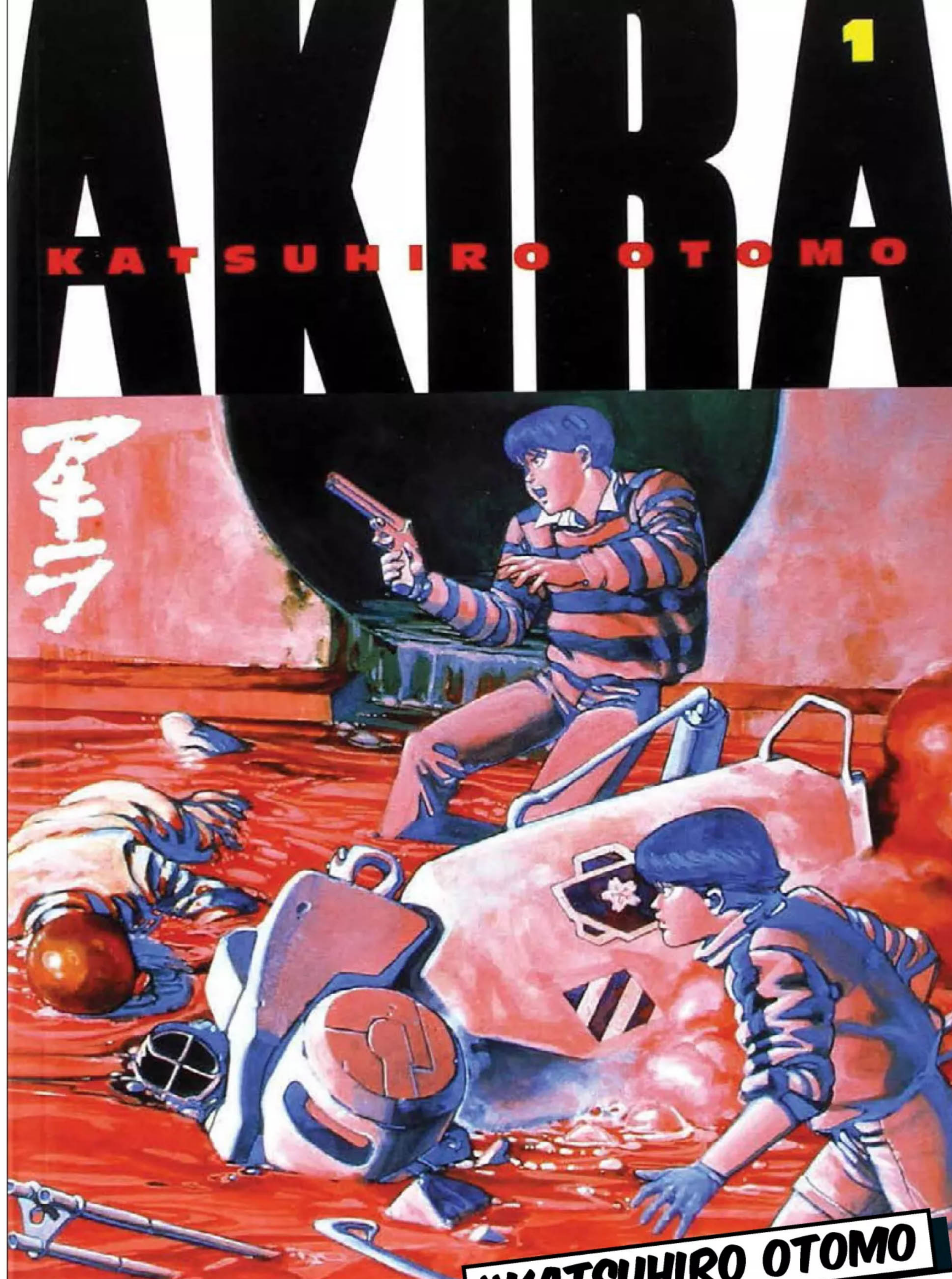
Publisher Kodansha **Writer** Katsuhiro Otomo **Artist** Katsuhiro Otomo

Collected in Akira: Vol 1 **Available digitally** N/A

One of the first manga to be translated in its entirety for the English-language market, this post-apocalyptic cyberpunk series is an absolute classic. First published in the Eighties, Katsuhiro Otomo's work has influenced many contemporary comic artists and *Akira* solidified his reputation as one of the masters of the medium.

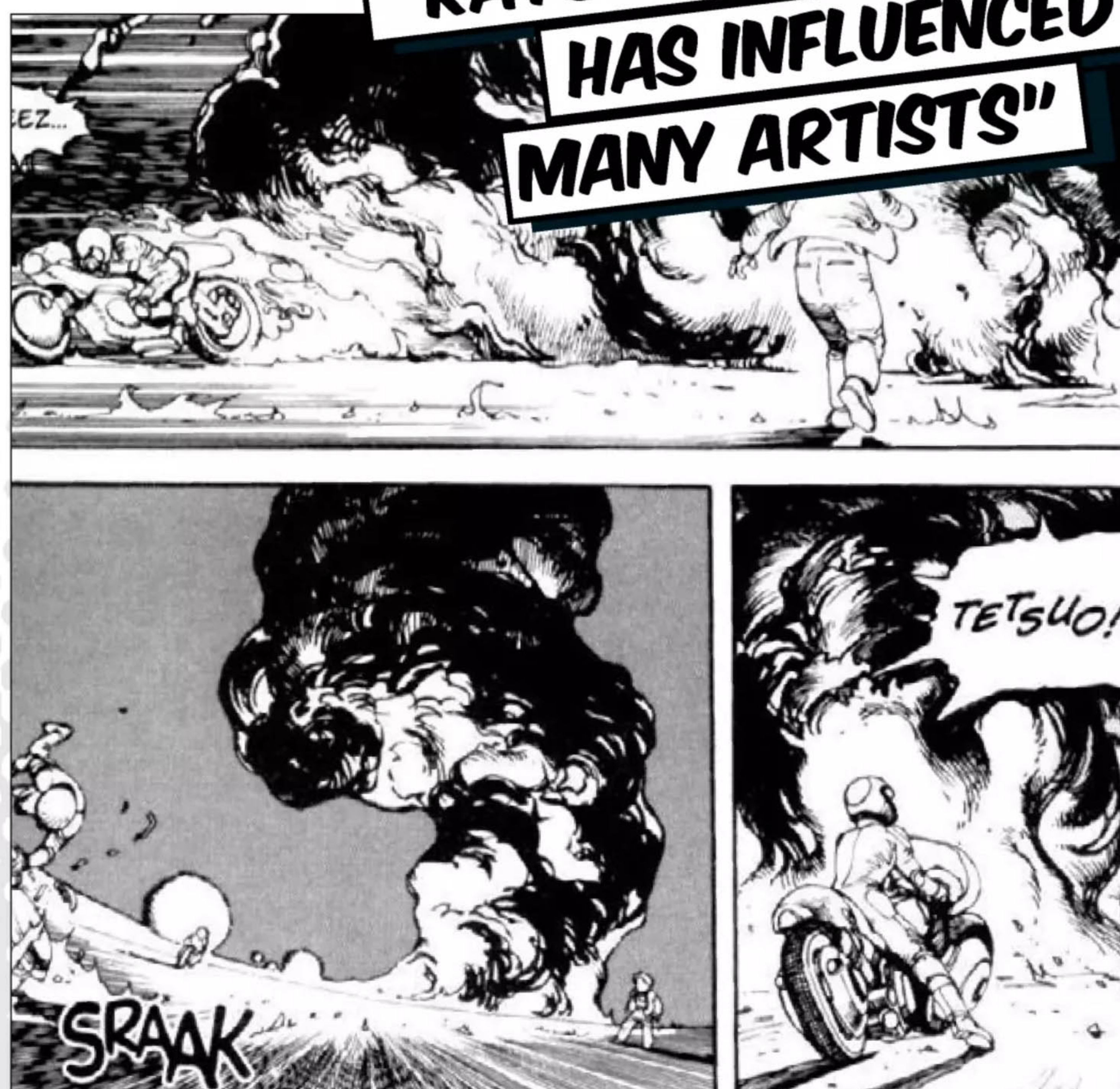
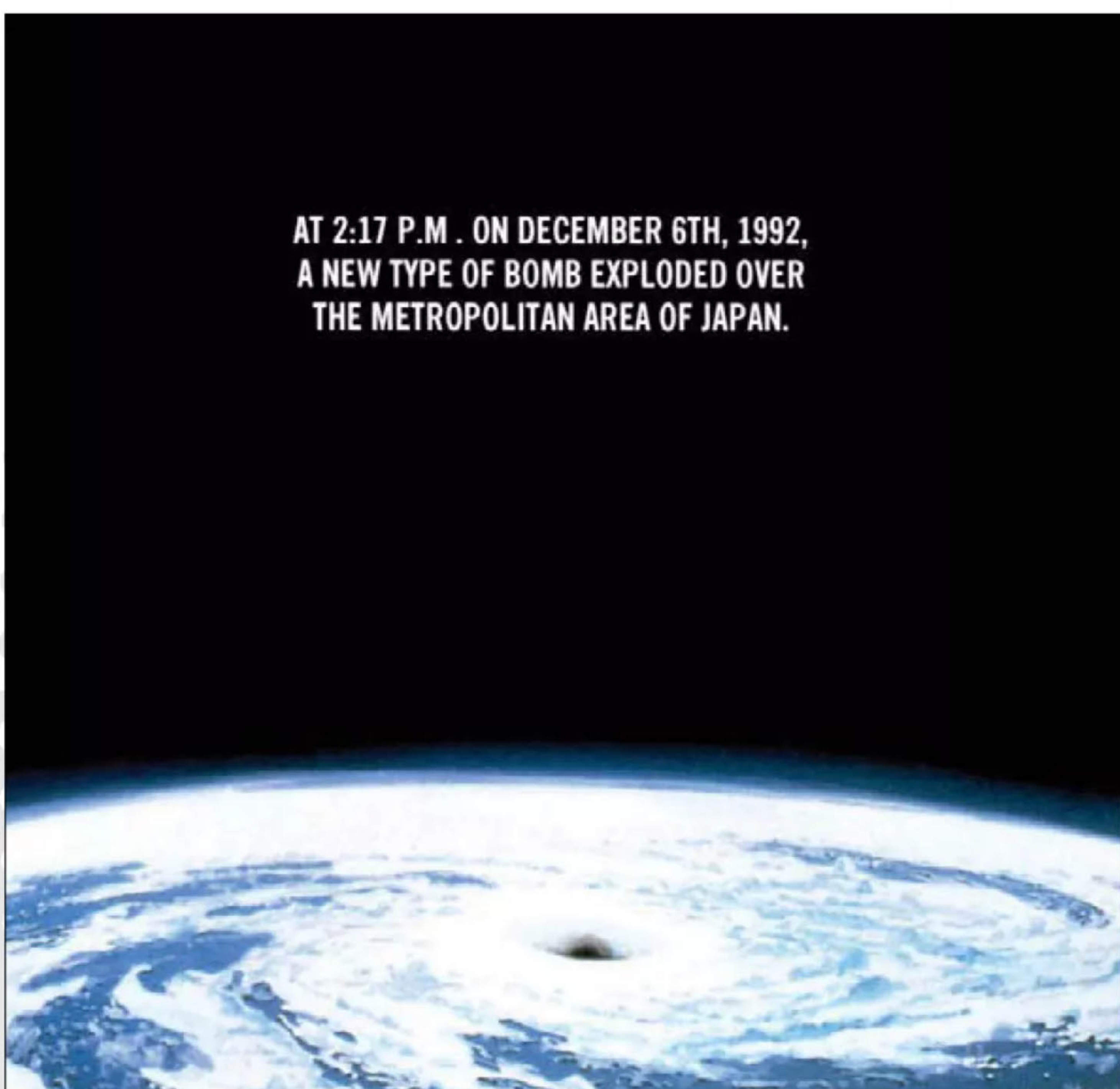
Set in the aftermath of a nuclear explosion that destroyed Tokyo and World War III, the 2019 Neo-Tokyo is besieged by gang violence and terrorism. Following the fates of Tetsuo and Kaneda, two members of a bōsōzoku motorcycle gang, the book opens with the former awakening his psychic powers as a result of a bike accident caused by the mysterious Takashi.

With a terrifying military presence and anti-government feeling running high throughout, *Akira* uses the futuristic setting and superhuman abilities to explore alienation, government corruption, honour-obsessed military, and an overall study of Japanese culture and establishment.



**"KATSUHIRO OTOMO
HAS INFLUENCED
MANY ARTISTS"**

AT 2:17 P.M. ON DECEMBER 6TH, 1992,
A NEW TYPE OF BOMB EXPLODED OVER
THE METROPOLITAN AREA OF JAPAN.



DARK HORSE BOOKS presents

BLACKSAD

Juan
DÍAZ CANALES

Juanjo
GUARNIDO

"As good as it gets!"
—Stan Lee

Greatest Comics

BLACKSAD

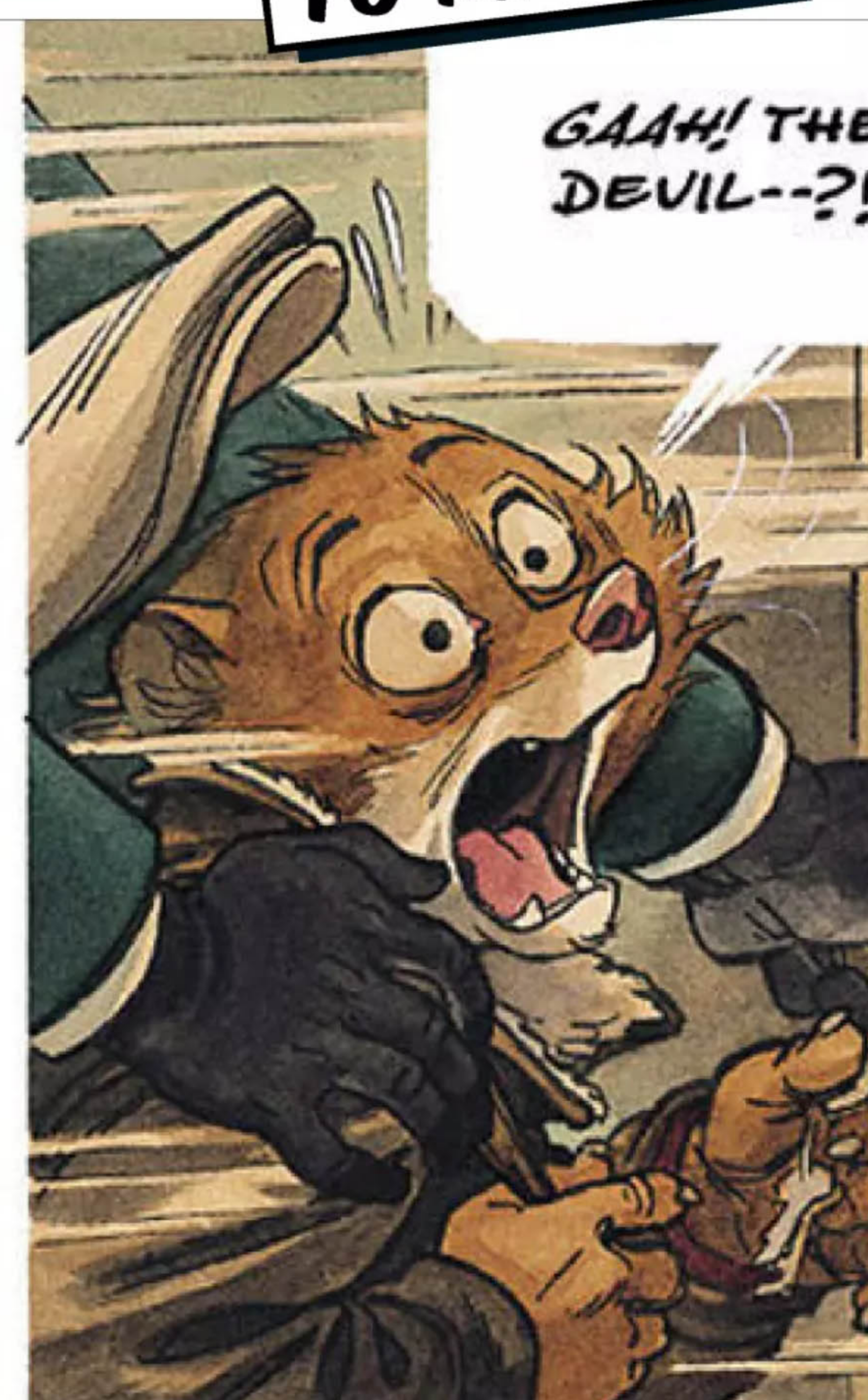
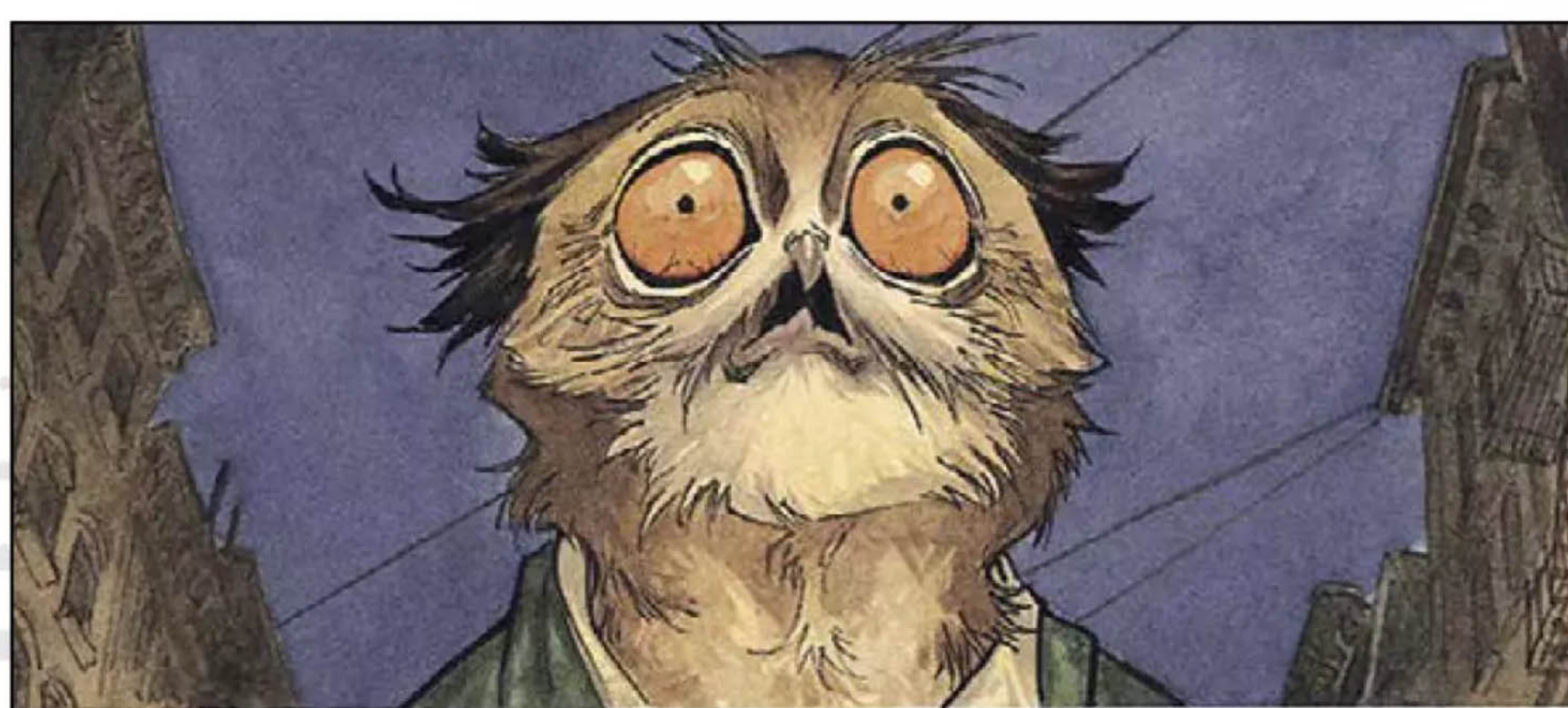
Details Originally published Blacksad: Quelque part entre les ombres (2000)
Publisher Dargaud, Dark Horse **Writer** Juan Díaz Canales **Artist** Juanjo Guarnido
Collected in Blacksad **Available digitally** Dark Horse Digital, Kindle

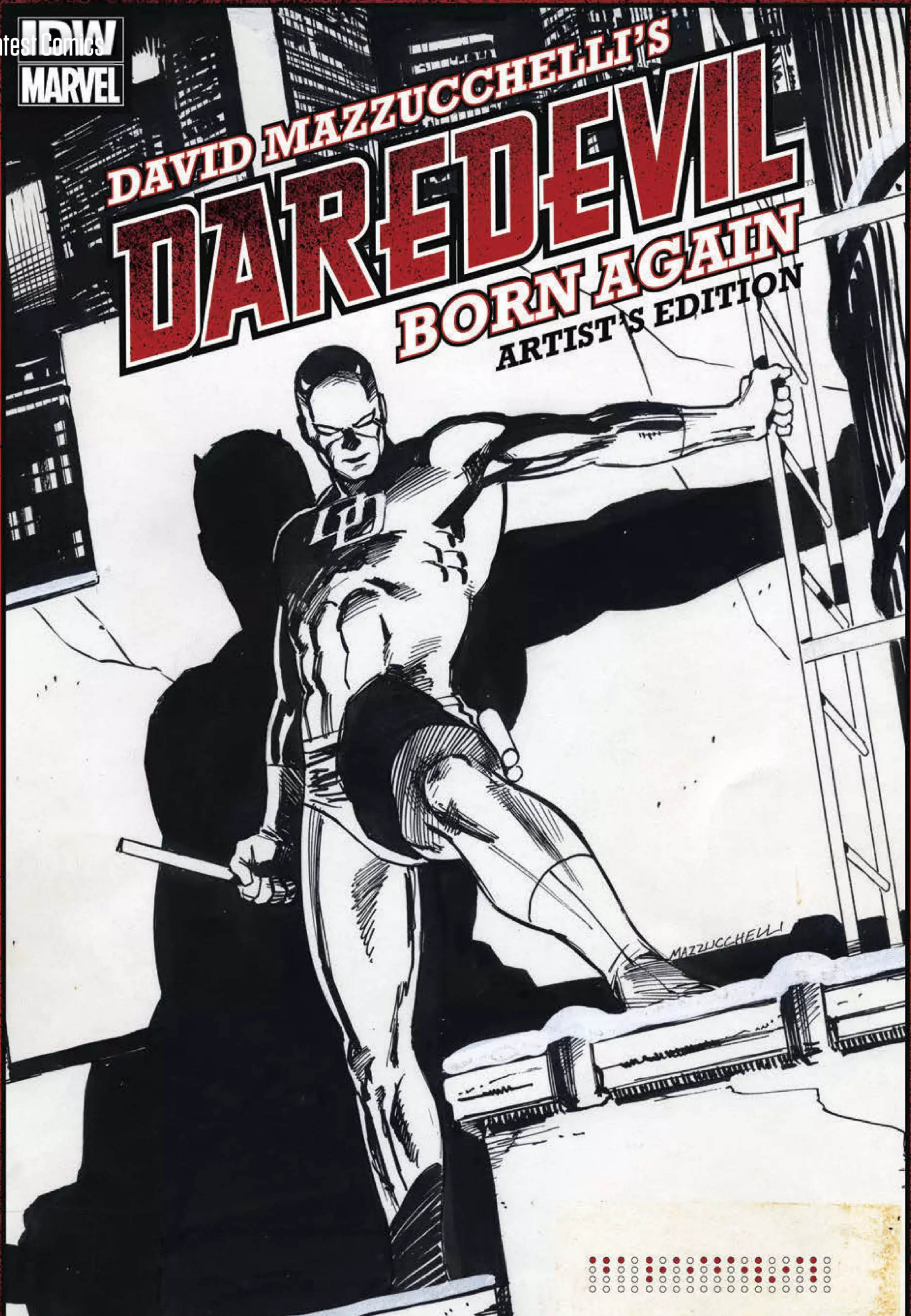
One of the crowning jewels of the large French bande dessinée market, *Blacksad* is easily one of the most beautiful comics ever created. English readers had to wait years for the first three volumes to be collected in one glorious book by Dark Horse, but the publisher has long since caught up, with volume five out in 2014.

The film noir style comic is set in Fifties America, with a cast of anthropomorphic animals that exploits stereotypes and points to character personalities. Blacksad himself is a hardboiled PI, investigating crimes while narrating proceedings. His cynicism is balanced by the chirpiness of his occasional sidekick, Weekly, a muckraking journalist for a tabloid newspaper.

With rat goons, a goanna hitman, a racist polar bear, and a nuclear physicist who also happens to be an owl, the gritty realism of *Blacksad* is perhaps a surprise to many. The stunning collection of the first three volumes is worth every penny.

**"THE GRITTY REALISM
IS PERHAPS SURPRISING
TO MANY"**





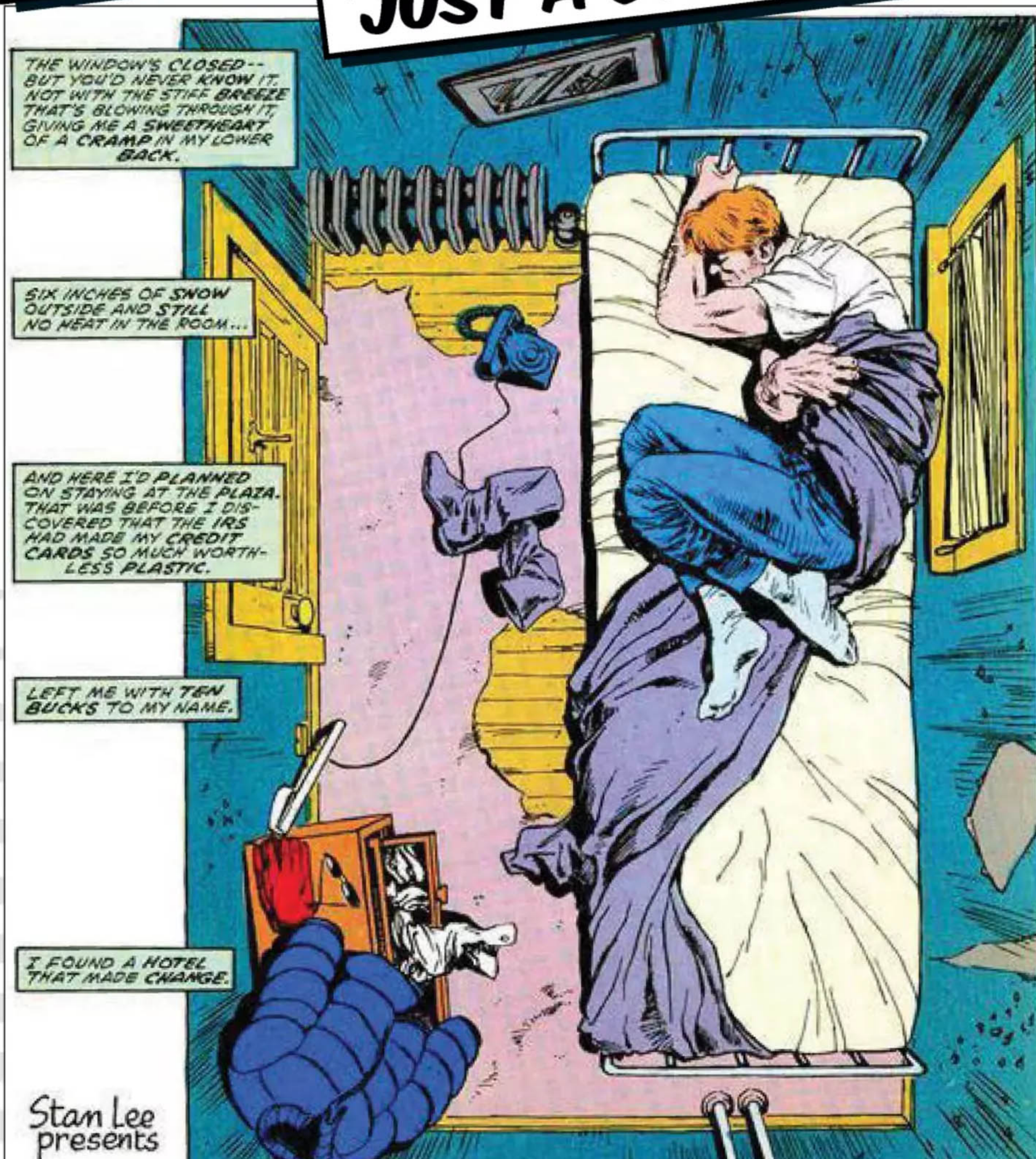
DAREDEVIL: BORN AGAIN

Details Originally published Daredevil 227-233 (1986) **Publisher** Marvel **Writer** Frank Miller
Artist David Mazzucchelli **Collected in** Daredevil: Born Again **Available digitally** Comixology, iBookstore, Marvel Unlimited

Frank Miller manages to delicately craft a portrait of a man teetering on the edge of sanity in his *Daredevil* run, taking a whole new look at the curse of superpowers and how they can affect the psyche. Miller lets Matt Murdock's besieging powers play themselves out in the background, never clumsily drawing attention to them, and instead lets Daredevil himself act human, slowly being worn down by the sheer relentlessness of being able to hear *everything*. "[My powers] are a great way to catch all the misery of being alive," he reflects at one point.

Born Again is a study of depression – of catching someone at their absolute lowest and seeing how they transform and morph under the weight of psychological illness. Throughout the Born Again arc, Miller strips away the levels of Daredevil that Murdock has built up over the years, every new injustice whacking away a layer of heroism until – in Murdock's own words – you're left with "just a blind man".

**"YOU'RE LEFT WITH
'JUST A BLIND MAN'"**



Stan Lee
presents

PURGATORY

By FRANK MILLER and DAVID MAZZUCHELLI

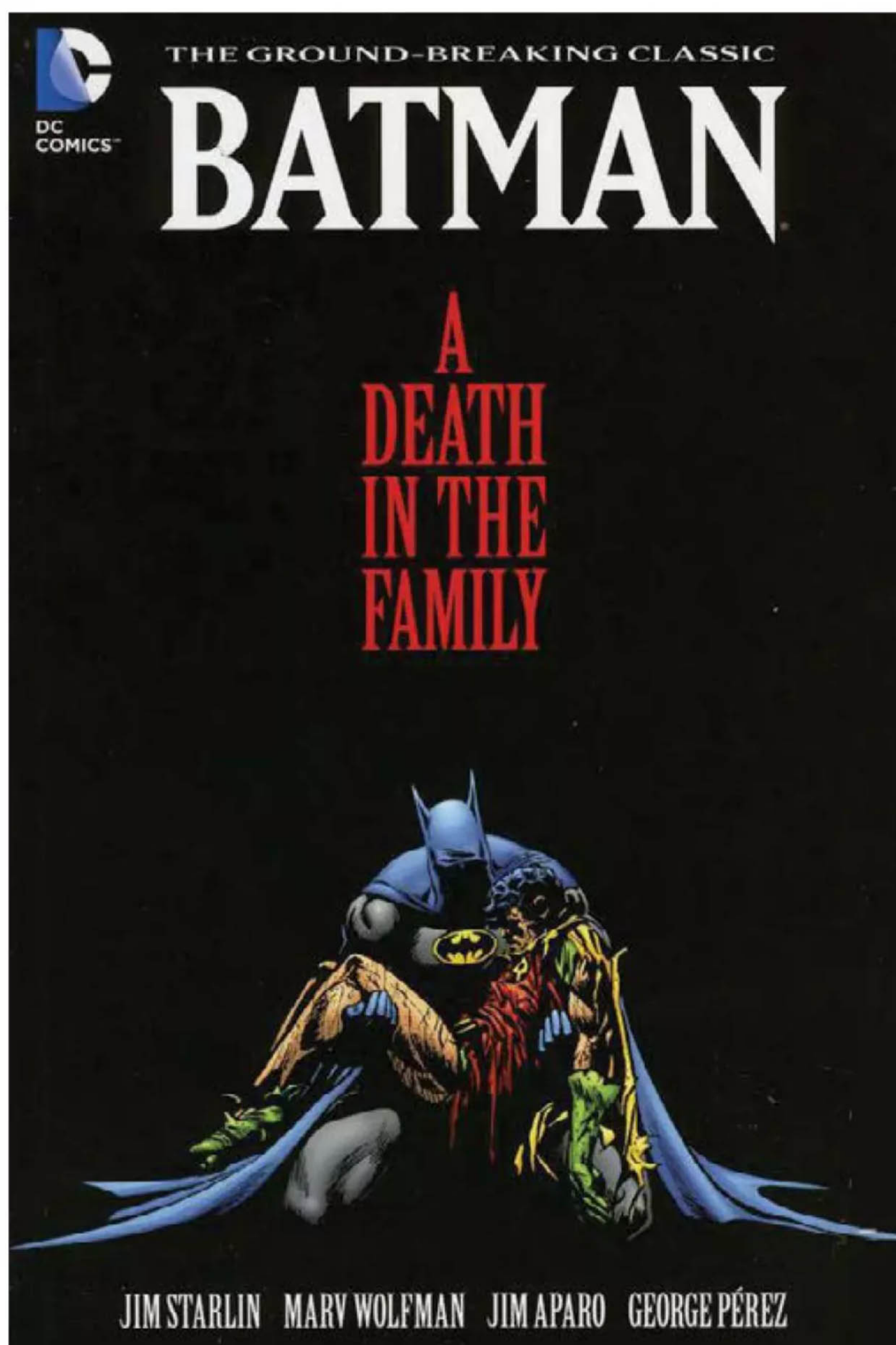
MAZZUCHELLI
COLORS

JOE ROSEN
LETTERS

RALPH MACCHIO
EDITOR

JIM SHOOTER
EDITOR IN CHIEF





BATMAN: A DEATH IN THE FAMILY

Details Originally published Batman #426-429 (1988-89) **Publisher** DC **Writer** Jim Starlin **Artists** Jim Aparo, Mike DeCarlo, John Constanza, Adrienne Roy **Collected in** Batman: A Death In The Family **Available digitally** Comixology, Kindle

If there's a book on this list you'll struggle with, it's this one.

Not because of the brutal punchline either, but because of how it tries, and fails, to engage with social issues. The sight of billionaire Bruce Wayne looking sad and dutiful on the streets of Ethiopia is exactly as bad as you think it is, and the Joker aligning with Iran in the big finale is shocking for all the wrong reasons. You can see where they're aiming, and the book gets marks for trying but these days it reads as crass at best and offensive at worst.

But you're here to watch Robin die.

And he does. And it's brutal, and horrifying and a moment that changes the DC universe forever. This is the first time Batman fails and for all the story's legion of failures, the emotional weight of the death is essential reading.

"YOU'RE HERE TO WATCH ROBIN DIE"



ALL-STAR SUPERMAN

Details Originally published All-Star Superman #1-12 (2005-08) **Publisher** DC **Writer** Grant Morrison **Artist** Frank Quitely **Collected in** All-Star Superman (£13.99) **Available digitally** Comixology

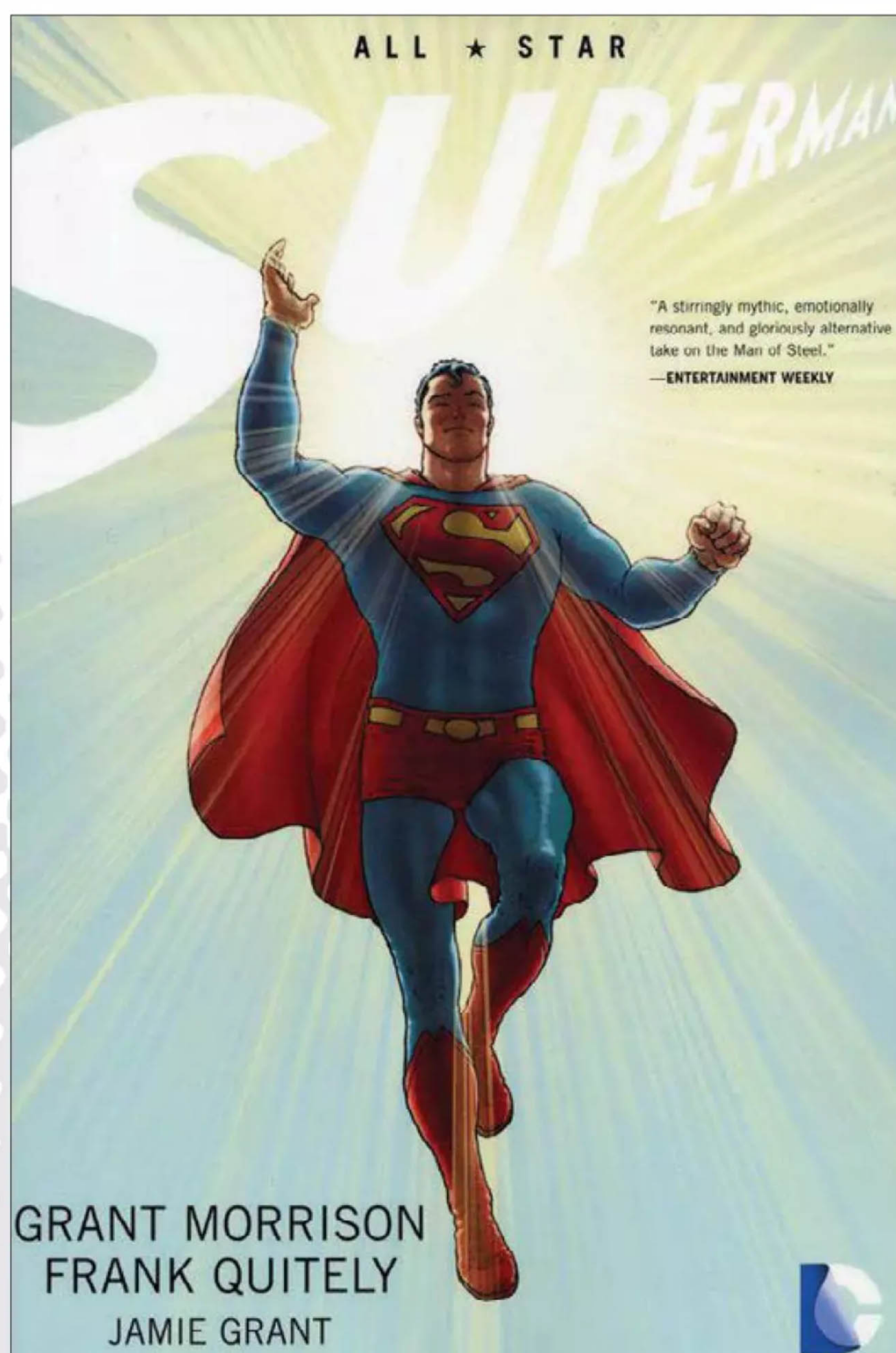
Are superheroes still relevant?

All-Star Superman doesn't waste time asking that question. Instead, it sets out exactly why and how we need them.

The premise: Superman is dying and wants to complete twelve tasks before he dies, many of which involve old friends and enemies (impressively synthesising seven decades of continuity).

Whether he's operating on a cosmic scale or talking to a single person, Superman's primary mission is to help people. For instance, he saves a planet, fights a living sun and convinces a teenage girl not to commit suicide. It's a hopeful, moving comic that uplifts rather than opting for darkness or violence.

Given that he's dying, though, even Superman can't stand up to mortality – except, of course, he can, as long as Superman stories are being told. That's why we need superheroes: to inspire us to help those who need it and stand for something greater than ourselves.





PHONOGRAM: RUE BRITANNIA



Kieron
GILLEN
Jamie
McKELVIE

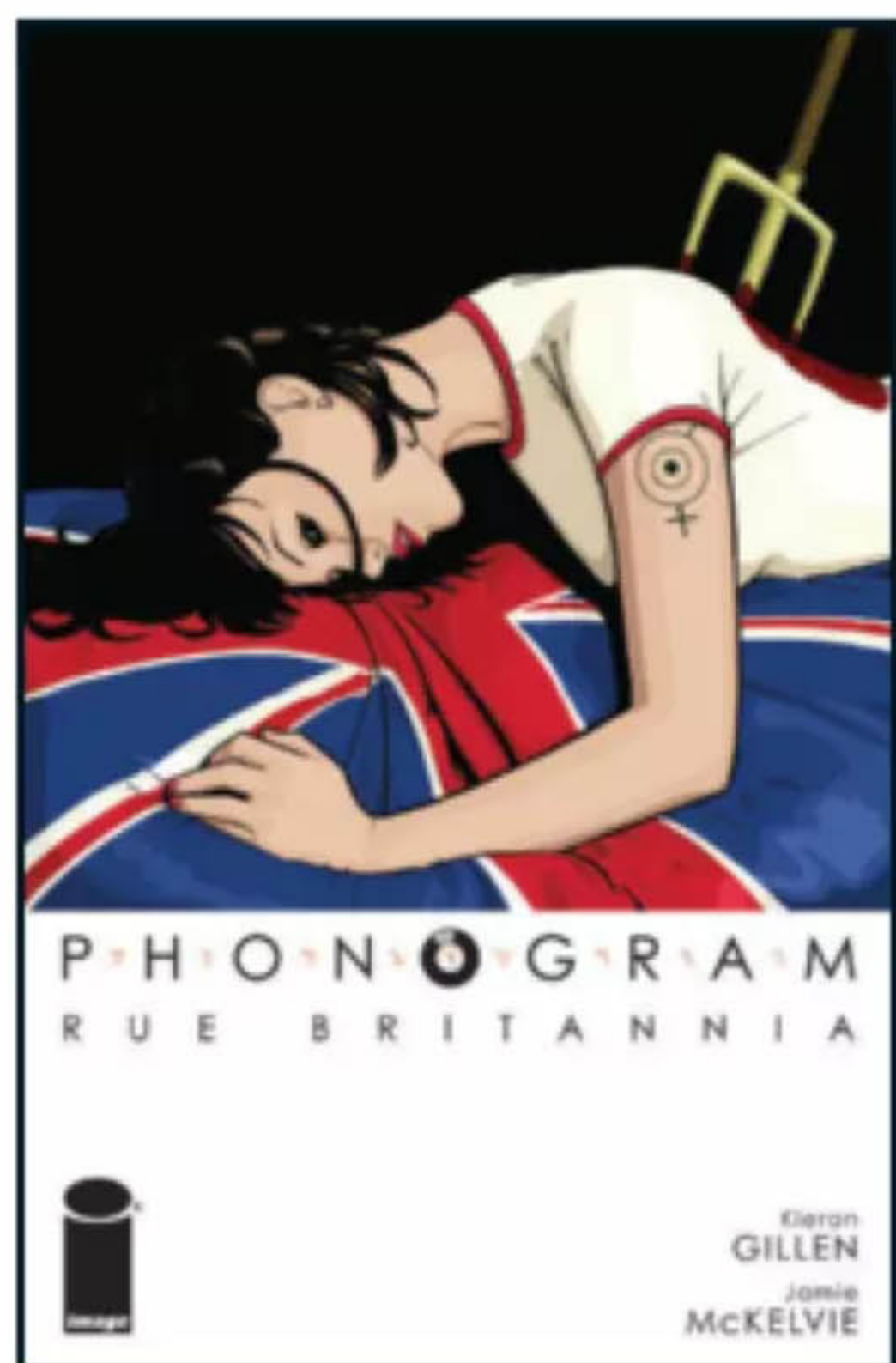
PHONOGRAM: RUE BRITANNIA

Details Originally published Phonogram: Vol 1 (2006) **Publisher** Image **Writer** Kieron Gillen **Artist** Jamie McKelvie **Collected in** Phonogram: Vol 1 - Rue Britannia **Available digitally** Comixology

Phonogram looks inaccessible at first – a navel-gazing sojourn through Nineties Britpop culture with references so precise they'd be obscure to anyone not of the scene. But Kieron Gillen's writing evokes a dark, magical fantasy out of the Britpop clique; an astute and self-deprecating reflection of the elitist musical culture of the time that ends up feeling like a cross between Nick Hornby and Stephen King – a universal tale for anyone that's ever been hung up on an ex-lover, or ignored by someone they admire.

McKelvie's art carries the gripping storyline through both time-travel and psychological change (the male protagonist is cursed to suffer periods at one point, for example) without ever feeling out of place. The minimalist black-and-white portraiture the book is composed of never ceases to impress, and McKelvie's straight-forward, no-frills decoration augments Gillen's direct and observation writing with aplomb. Fans of dark humour, musical commentary and *real* characters, take note.





BREAKING INTO COMIC BOOKS

Creating a comic-book perhaps isn't as difficult to get into as producing a film or a TV show, but there are hurdles any budding writers or artists should be aware of. Current Marvel writer Kieron Gillen recalls his journey through the industry, and offers advice for aspiring creators

Like many of the comic-book creators Kieron Gillen, creator of Phonogram, recounted the same nostalgic story of how he originally got into comics, namedropping the books he read in his that inspired them to do so. The only interchangeable details are usually the era, creators and characters. Steve Ditko's run on *Spider-Man* in the Sixties, O'Neil/Adams on *Batman* in the Seventies, and Frank Miller's acclaimed *Daredevil* run in the Eighties tend to pop up a fair amount, for example. As with any medium, the greatest comic-books have the capacity to turn audience into creators, whether that's via crude childhood drawings, or sophisticated, career-making masterworks.

But not all comic-book creators were inspired in quite the same way. Wanting to know more, we asked someone whose ascent to comic-book fame has been relatively fast. Before working in the industry, Kieron Gillen earned a positive reputation as a games journalist among his

peers. He admits, however, that he came into comic-books late – a byproduct of there being no comic-book shop in Stafford, where Gillen hails from, throughout his youth. “Basically, the only thing you had to read were reprints on the news stands or 2000 AD, that sort of thing. I kind of drifted away from it. I got back into comics, even just as a one graphic novel a year guy, when I was 21, and I picked up a copy of *Watchmen*, and I read that. Then I was essentially reading one Vertigo book a year.

“When I was 25, I sort of just fell into it – it was like discovering bookshops or pop music when you're 25. The idea is there's 100 years of history there, and all these classics I know absolutely nothing about. So that's kind of how I came into it; I discovered it really late, and then just fell right, deeply in love with the medium.”

Within six months of that, Gillen had attended his first comic-book convention, written his first script, and even had work printed in the small press. Engaging the

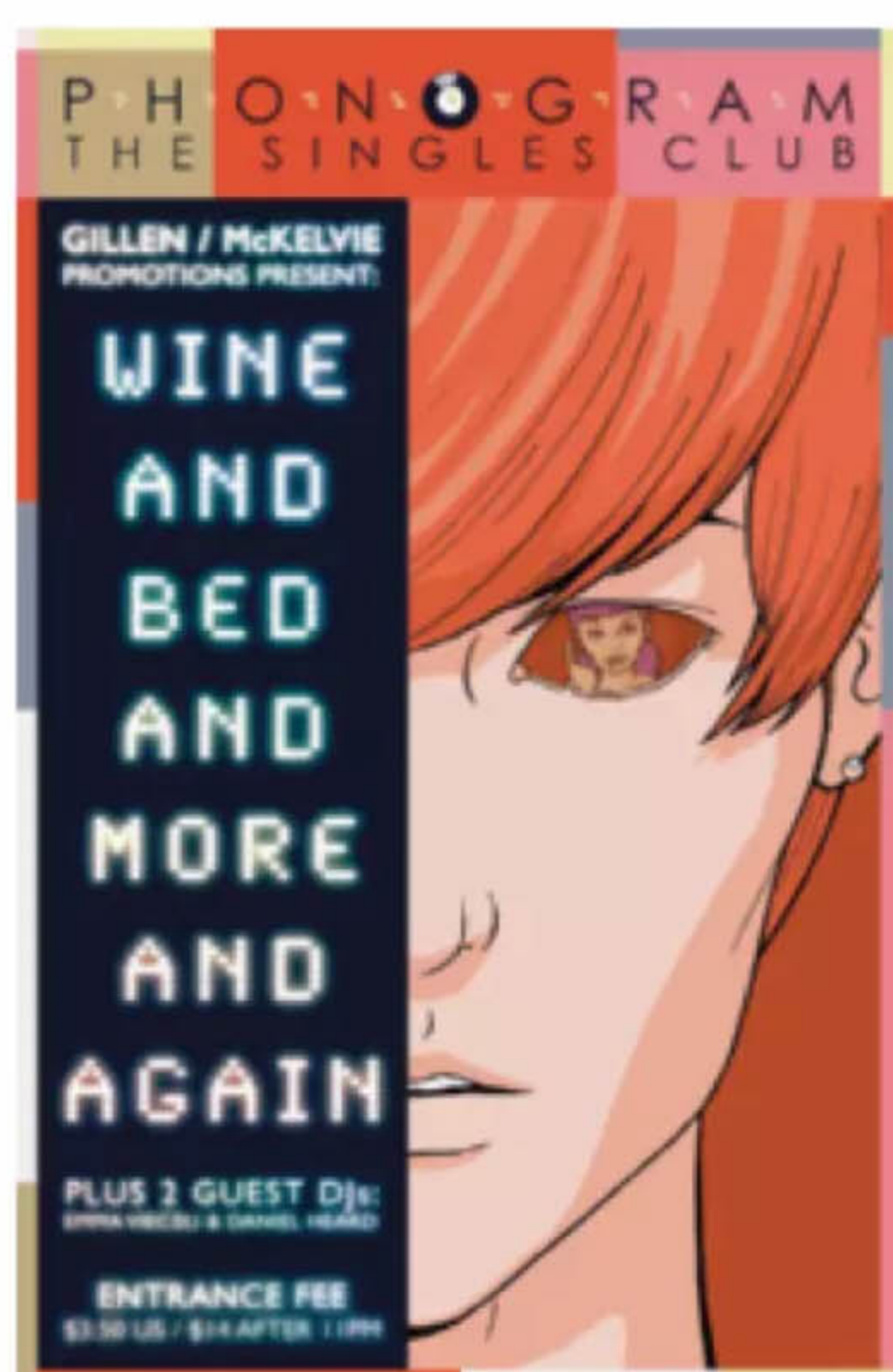
scene through forums and conventions was the key to Gillen meeting his first major collaborator, artist Jamie McKelvie, with whom he co-created the Image Comics book *Phonogram*.

“We both kind of came from early Noughties web culture, basically”, Gillen recalls. “I was on a couple of forums that Jamie was on as well, and we knew people who knew people. I was basically finding people to collaborate with. And I was selling one of these anthologies, and Jamie came up to the table and said ‘hello!’ with his impeccable warmth, and showed me his portfolio.” Gillen and McKelvie discussed work for an anthology, and they became friends after then. “But the crucible of our relationship was completely around *Phonogram*. That was, I think 2003, and *Phonogram* came out in 2006.”

Gillen may have started on lower-profile titles with smaller publishers, but he now co-writes the long-running *Uncanny X-Men*, and writes his own *X-Men* offshoot, *Generation Hope*. This follows a successful run on *Thor*. Within just two years of *Phonogram* hitting shelves, Gillen, after having his independent work championed by the esteemed writer Warren Ellis, was producing scripts for Marvel.

Yet, he doesn't necessarily recommend that anyone sets writing a story for one of the publisher's icons as a target, rather that you should improve your craft and get your work out there first. “Say you actually want to work at Marvel, and you only want to work at Marvel, I'd say that's actually a bad thing. You're a writer, or an artist. This is what you should care about. If you're a writer and you want to work at Marvel, they don't look at your work cold. They look for writers who prove their skill, and the only place you're going to prove your skill is actually going and doing a book with a smaller publisher.”

We asked Gillen about his experience pitching *Phonogram*, which seemed to be a combination of knowing the right people and having the correct discipline. “Jamie had also done a book with Eric Stephenson, he's at Image Comics now. *Long Hot Summer*, it's called. So there was ➤



Phonogram: The Singles Club is available to buy for £10.99.



Phonogram won real favour with critics.



“WHEN I WAS 25, I SORT
OF JUST FELL INTO IT – IT
WAS LIKE DISCOVERING
BOOKSHOPS OR POP MUSIC
WHEN YOU’RE 25”

KIERON GILLEN

THE ROAD TO SUCCESS

Gillen's tips for potential comic writers

BE UNDERSTANDING

"You write a script quite quickly, but the artist is drawing it for months. I try to write a script a week, but I've done more, I can do more. That leaves a lot of time for you to think about it, but an artist is going to be drawing that script for the rest of the month. At the very, very, very least, there's a 1:4 ratio of time."

ACCEPT YOU MUST IMPROVE

"If you're good enough, people will work with you. I had a friend pitching comics at various publishers. I wasn't doing that, because I wasn't good enough. Why would I want my comics published in a larger market now? I'm just not there yet."

LEARN BY DOING

"If you sit down and write scripts, you will not learn anything until someone draws them. You can write 100 pages of script, you'll learn more when you see one page drawn. You'll see every stupid mistake you're doing. Comic scripts are a blueprint for an art form."

HAVE SELF-RESPECT

"There's lots of ways to blow it, but being good will buy you a chance. I'm not saying I'm the best comic-book writer in any way ever; I've just had nothing published where I'm embarrassed to have my name on it. There are anthologies where I could've done better, but I'm not kicking myself over it, and that's important."

INCONSISTENCY IS PART OF THE BUSINESS

"You're just going to have to deal with a lot of artists flaking. My first work was on something called *Hits*, which had stories about the different definitions of the word 'hit'. I wrote ten scripts, and five of them got drawn. Five of the artists I worked with flaked. That's a pretty good ratio."

kind of an 'in' at Image there." Gillen was pitching the book at Oni Press at the time with one page, a script and a seven-page pitch document. Image approached them, however, asking that the book be sent in their direction. "That was easy. Everything else about *Phonogram* was hard, but the pitching process... we did some pages, we took it to them, they liked it, and we did a comic."

Economically, *Phonogram* ran into the hurdles that can affect any creator-owned independent comic book. Despite being well-received, it didn't reach the same numbers as other, more mainstream-friendly titles at Image, due in part to its subject of Britpop fantasy. The direct market, where retailers have to pay for books up front without being able to return

them, naturally makes any purchase a gamble for comic-book stores. *Phonogram* was selling, but not enough to fund it as a monthly operation.

"The problem with Image is it's a back-end deal," Gillen explains. "They don't, as a matter of course, do up-front payments... you get your money three months later based upon how many copies were ordered. So you don't get any money, even if it sells well, until after the comic comes out. In that case, you've got an artist who is basically drawing for free. Writers generally don't get the money, in that case."

The maths turned out to be difficult for the creators. "Let's say the first 3,000 copies you sell go to Image, which is for the printing. You pay back the printing, you

pay back the fee for running the book, that kind of stuff. And anything over those first 3,000 copies is yours. Let's say you get a dollar an issue for 3,001 copies; you get one dollar. 4,000 copies, you get \$1,000. You basically get a higher wage if you're selling a few percent more. *Phonogram* sold about 4,000 copies on pre-orders. In other words, reduce that a bit, and you can see very little money coming in from that. If we were selling even slightly more, Jamie would've been okay."

Gillen and McKelvie learned to accept this as part of the industry, but the book couldn't continue with so little money coming in for the creators. "That's basically what screws you as a creator-owned, back-end book. On the other hand, if you're a hit, you can do really well – *The Walking Dead* is doing incredibly well. We were never going to be *The Walking Dead* with *Phonogram* because it's an awkward bastard and it's very dislikeable, but even if it did slightly better – 6,000 issues a month – that would have been securable. But that's comics. Artists basically starve, and writers spend the entire time working out how on earth they can actually get some more money for the artist."

Here's the key point to remember, though. Despite every struggle Gillen and McKelvie encountered when putting *Phonogram* out there, the experience was tremendously validating to them. "Oh yeah. Would I be doing anything I'm doing now without *Phonogram*? Hell no. *Phonogram* was an incredible artistic experience. Like Jack Kirby says, comics will break your heart. There was something of Rorschach to it; we do not choose to do this thing, we do it because we feel compelled. If I had any sense, I probably wouldn't have been doing it, but if I had any sense, I'd probably have got another job at some point in my life. You are driven by your passion. And a book like *Phonogram*, it is a bit of a weird book. But the fact that people did respond to it... we've done like 13-14,000 of the first trade at least. These aren't small numbers. It did find an audience, just not an audience that can lead to the production of a comic-book in a regular fashion."

Phonogram paid off for Gillen, whose mainstream work is held in high esteem by readers and critics. "There's a very old line in the comic-book industry that applies to almost all creative industries – three qualities. Being good, being personable, and being on time. Any two of those qualities will get you all the work you could ever require anywhere."

Gillen believes that the future of comics buying is heading in two directions, which could be potentially positive for new creators – the digital platforms, where the

Gillen's success earned him a run on *Uncanny X-Men*.





PHONOGRAM THE SINGLES CLUB

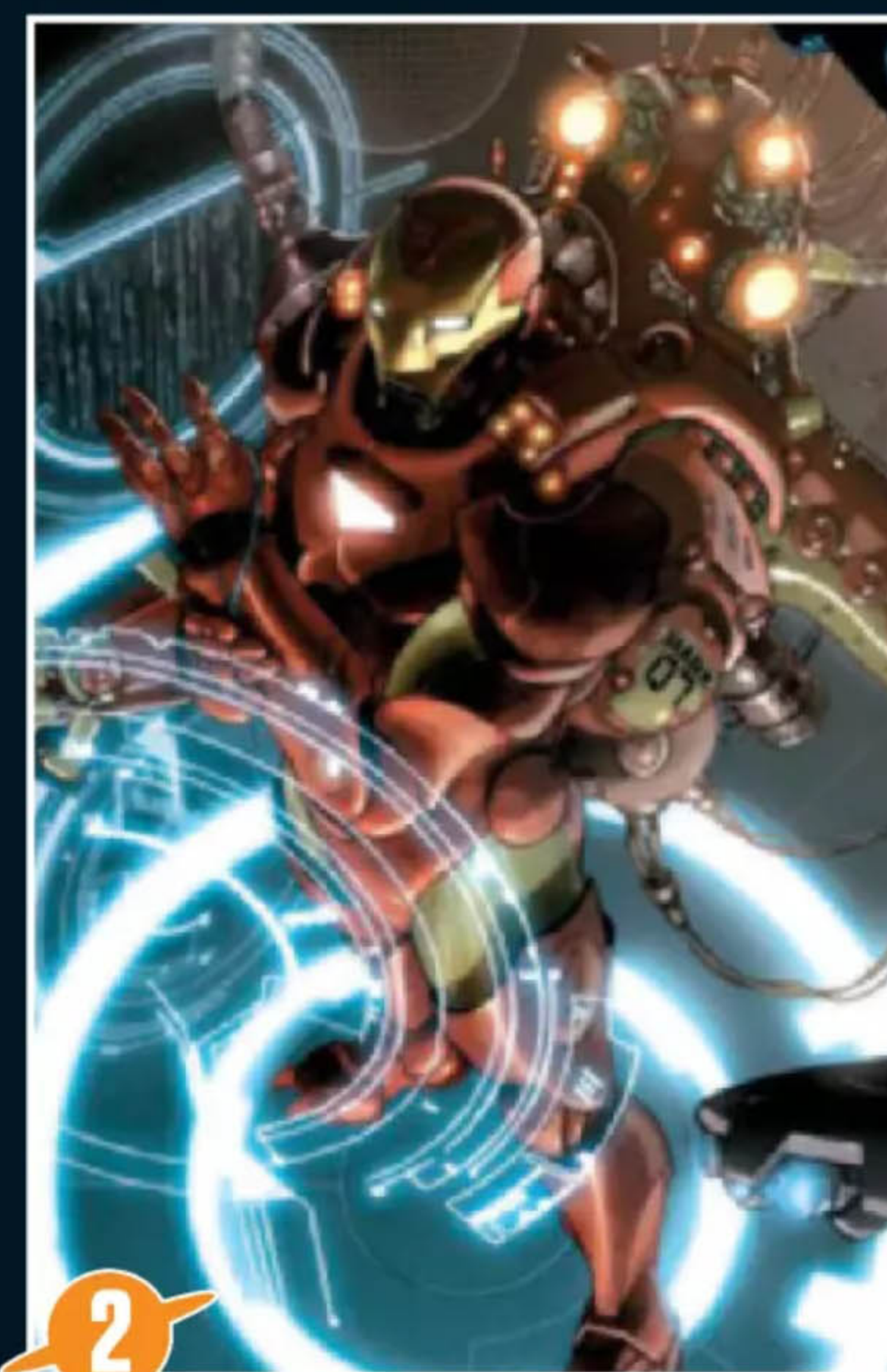
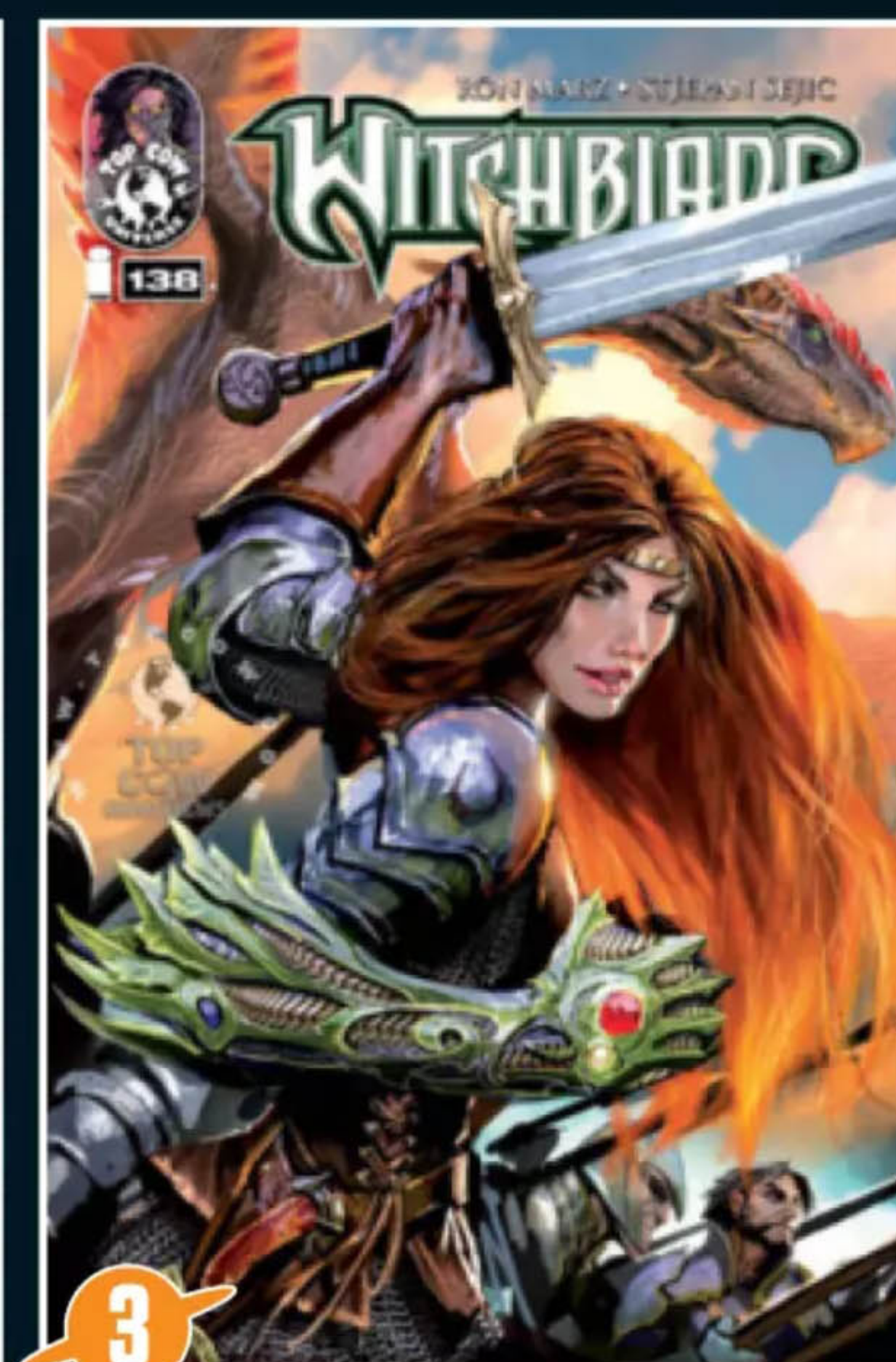
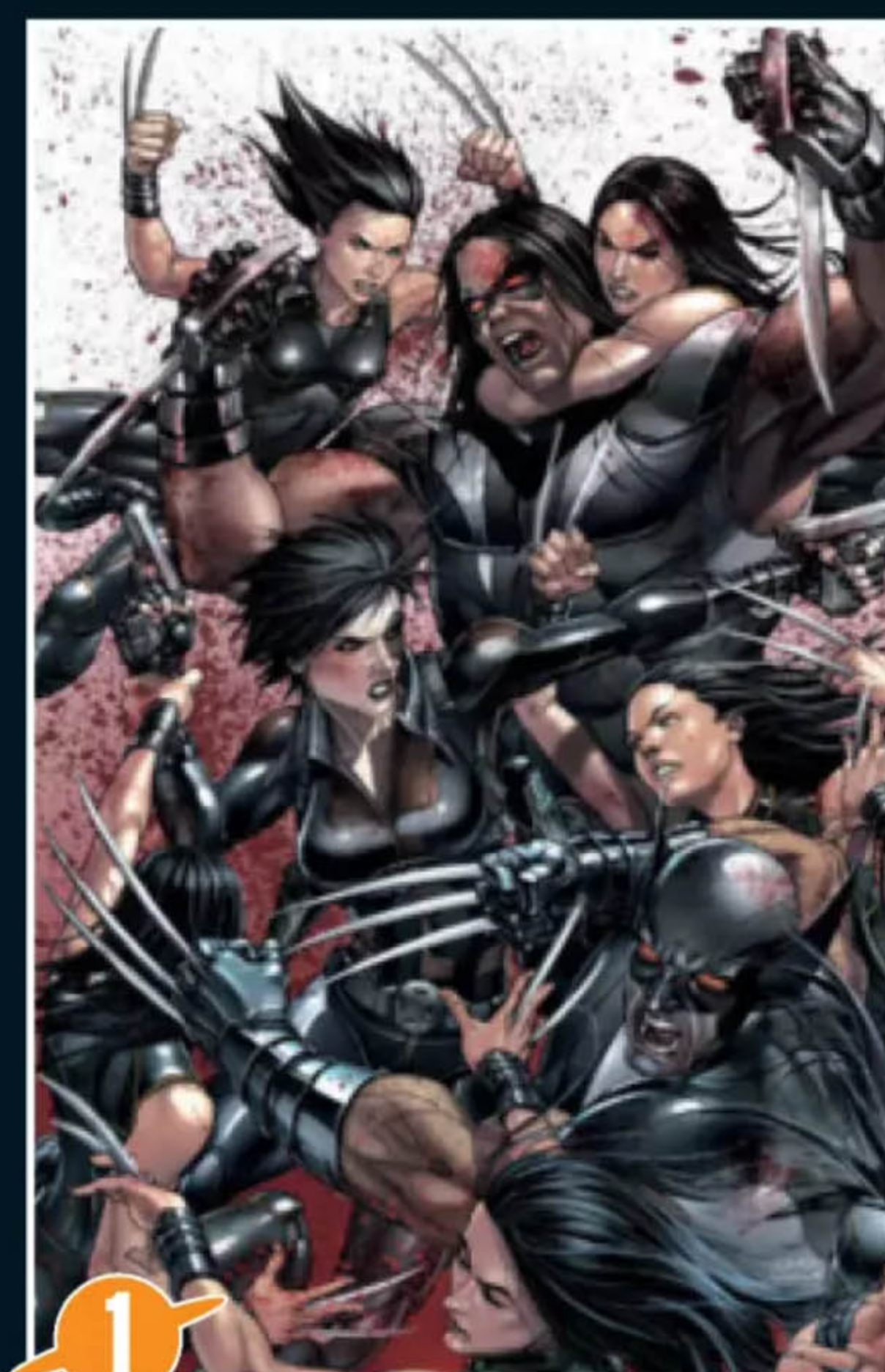
KIERON GILLEN & JAMIE McKELVIE

“ARTISTS BASICALLY STARVE, AND WRITERS SPEND THE ENTIRE TIME WORKING OUT HOW ON EARTH THEY CAN GET SOME MONEY FOR THE ARTIST” KIERON GILLEN

basic £1.19 price will likely reduce over time and the rise of the collector's edition hardcovers (“beautiful fetish objects, essentially”). Both can already be seen in the ComiXology app for the iPad, where books are launching day-and-date with the print books, while DC in particular seems to be veering towards higher end printed collector's editions with its Absolute line. Digital distribution could offer potential creators an entirely new outlet with which to distribute their books, Gillen is undecided on whether ComiXology could've helped *Phonogram*. “Maybe. If we're selling 2,500 copies, we're making no money. In other words, if we sold 500 copies on ComiXology, that would be making more money than we'd make by selling 3,500. However, if you're basically using that as a loss leader to sell the trade, that would be more money than selling 3,500.”

The comic-book industry isn't an impenetrable fortress. Like any form of publishing, it is a creative outlet that anyone with the right drive and talent can be a part of. “The most wonderful thing about comics is the fact there's such a low-entry threshold”, says Gillen. “Historically, while self-publishing in books is a scarlet letter, self-publishing in comics is a badge of honour. For a long time comics existed in a place where no publisher would take them seriously. If you believed in the work, you published it. All the time you spend not doing is time you're wasting.”

Phonogram: Rue Britannia and *Phonogram: The Singles Club* are available from Image Comics, while the first volume can be downloaded via ComiXology. *Generation Hope* and *Uncanny X-Men* are published monthly by Marvel, and are available in all good comic shops.



FUTURE SHOCKS

Writers and artists who'll take over the comic-book industry in 5-10 years

Michael Choi

Occupation: Artist
Known for: X-Force

1 Michael Choi is one of the most exciting artists out there right now. From his very first issue of Top Cow's *Witchblade* to the last, Choi's work has improved tenfold. Having worked extensively for Marvel, his reputation will only improve in years to come.

Matt Fraction

Occupation: Writer
Known for: Invincible Iron Man

2 Fraction has risen at Marvel within a similar timeframe to Gillen; the two even co-wrote *Uncanny X-Men* together until recently. Fraction is currently known for his work bringing Clint Barton and Kate Bishop together in *Hawkeye* and *Sex Criminals* on which he works with artist Chip Zdarsky.

Stjepan Šejic

Occupation: Artist
Known for: Witchblade

3 Šejic's artwork has a flavour of the mid-Nineties style about it, but the fact that it's all fully painted sets it apart somewhat. After an initially well-received run, Top Cow signed the artist up to an exclusive contract to draw *Witchblade* for a massive 35 issues. Work at Marvel soon followed.

JT Krul

Occupation: Writer
Known for: Teen Titans

4 Having produced stories for the independent publisher Aspen, Krul soon found regular work at DC, having launched a new *Green Arrow* title last year and becoming the regular writer on *Teen Titans*. He now appears to have become a mainstay at the publisher.



FRANK MILLER'S

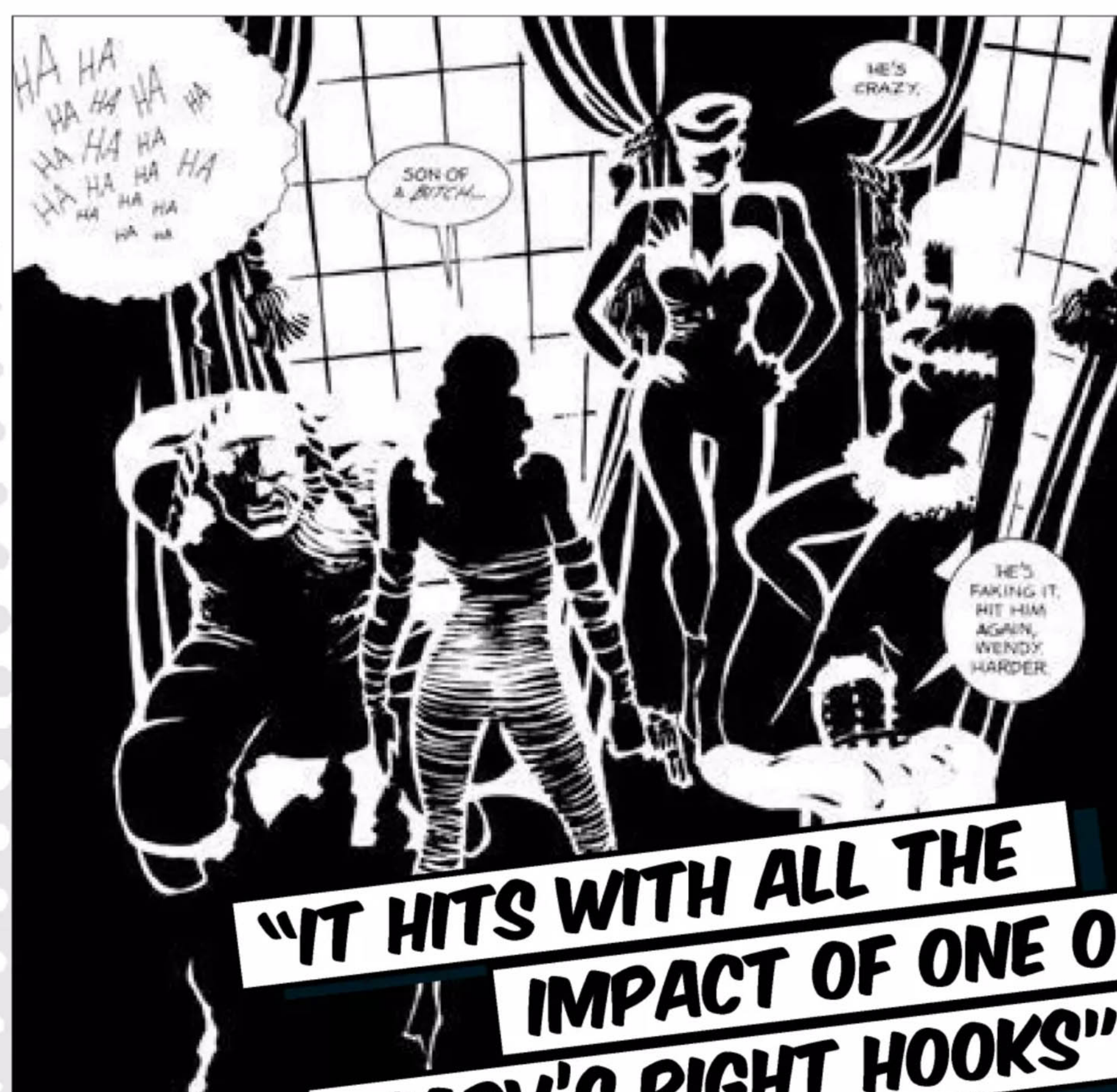
THE HARD GOODBYE

SIN CITY

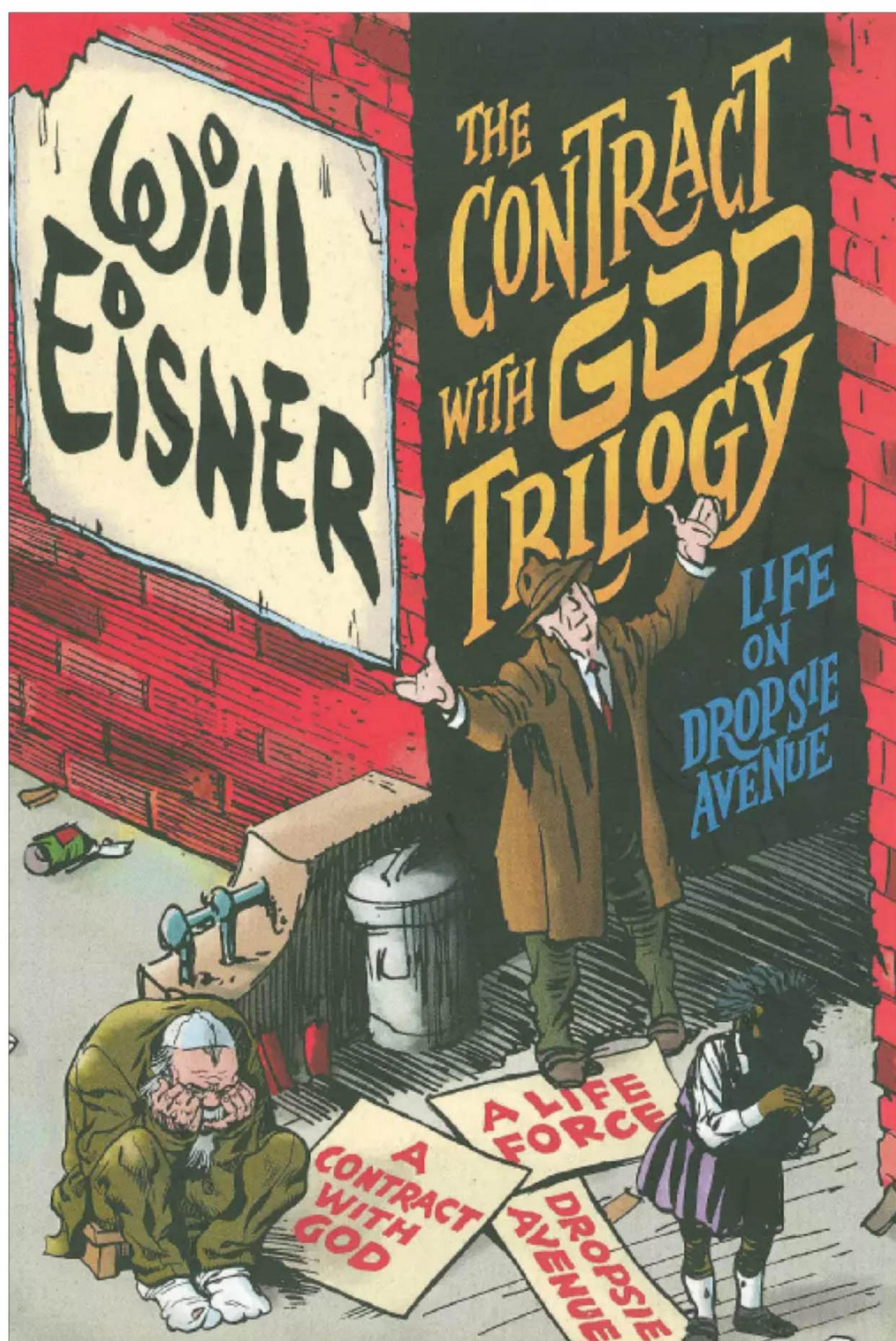
Details Originally published Dark Horse Presents #51-62 (1991-92) **Publisher** Dark Horse Comics **Writer** Frank Miller **Artist** Frank Miller **Collected in** Sin City: The Hard Goodbye **Available digitally** Dark Horse Digital

Here, Miller had free rein to indulge his love of (as one of the volumes is titled), booze, broads and bullets, not to mention classic American cars and classic American hard men. The stony jaws of Thirties movie stars, from James Cagney to Humphrey Bogart, the smooth curves of Corvettes and Mustangs, and the stunning looks and cold hearts of dames to kill for provide the *Sin City* series with its raison d'être.

The hyper-stylised art and non-more-hard-boiled dialogue go hand in hand, as we watch ugly mug Marv punch his way to the truth, heartbroken Dwight get plastic surgery thanks to a run-in with his ex, or bum-ticker-ed cop Hartigan sacrifice everything to protect skinny little Nancy Callahan. *Sin City* comes from a place of love and it hits with all the impact of one of Marv's right hooks. Stylish, gritty and a huge amount of fun.



**"IT HITS WITH ALL THE
IMPACT OF ONE OF
MARV'S RIGHT HOOKS"**



A CONTRACT WITH GOD

Details Originally published *A Contract With God And Other Tenement Stories* (1978-95) **Publisher** Baronet Books
Writer Will Eisner **Artist** Will Eisner **Collected in** N/A **Available digitally** Kindle

His Golden Age credentials undisputed, Will Eisner – creator of *The Spirit* – kickstarted a new, more introspective and deeply personal age of comics with the first in his three-volume *A Contract With God* series – arguably the first modern graphic novel. As deft a cartoonist as he was a writer, Eisner peered behind the crisp suit jackets, off-the-shoulder gowns and big band jazz of *The Spirit*'s stylised New York City to reveal the crumbling tenement's of his own childhood, exploring the lives of Jewish immigrants in the Bronx of the Thirties through a series of semi-autobiographical shorts.

A Contract With God stands the other side of the curtains from the great literary portraits of the era, forever on the outside looking in thanks to a cartoonish brand of clunky melodrama and exaggerated reality. A fitting legacy indeed for a tale of love, life and loss on the wrong side of the tracks.



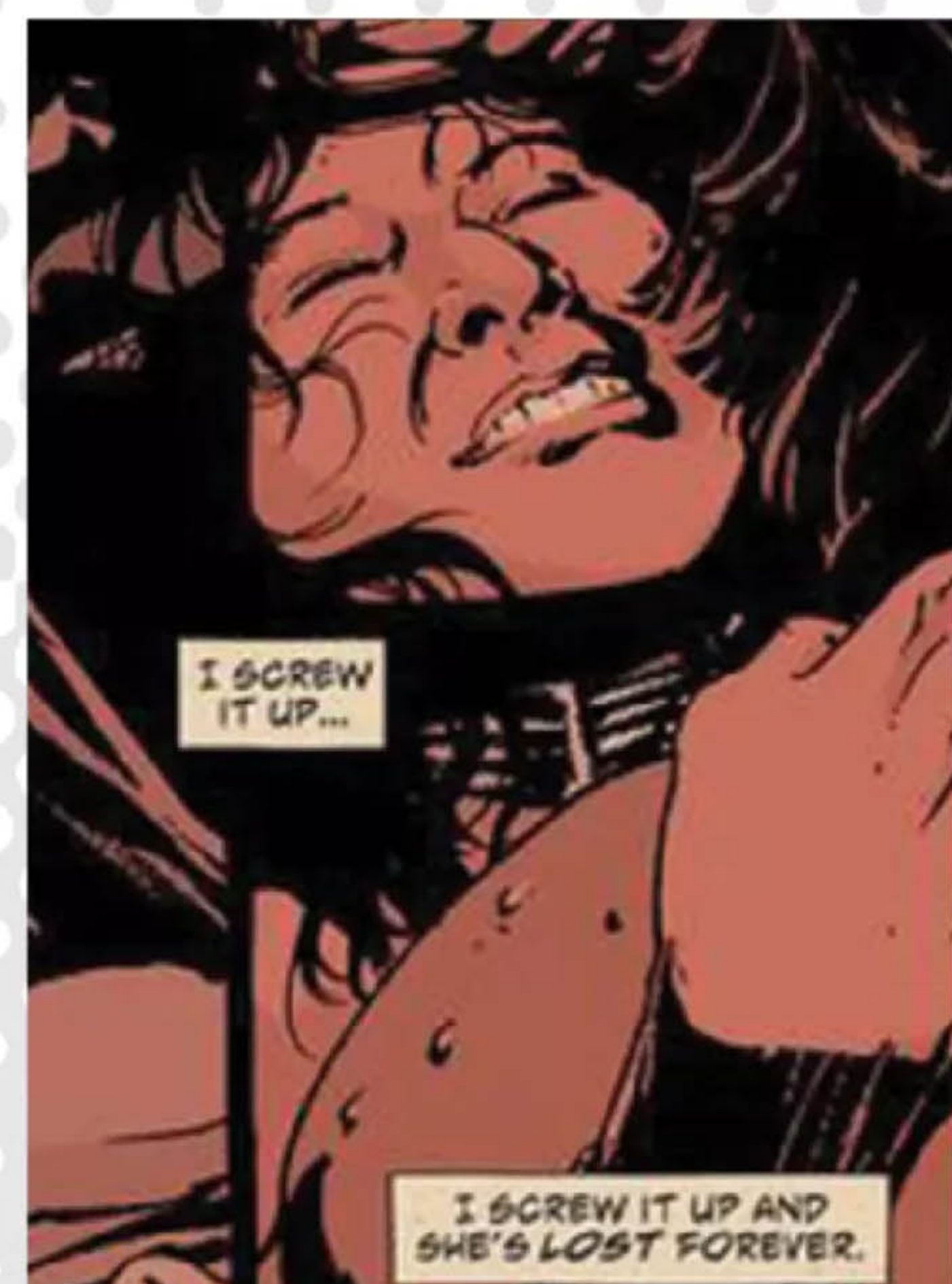
"A FITTING LEGACY FOR A TALE OF LOVE"

SCALPED: THE GRAVEL IN YOUR GUTS

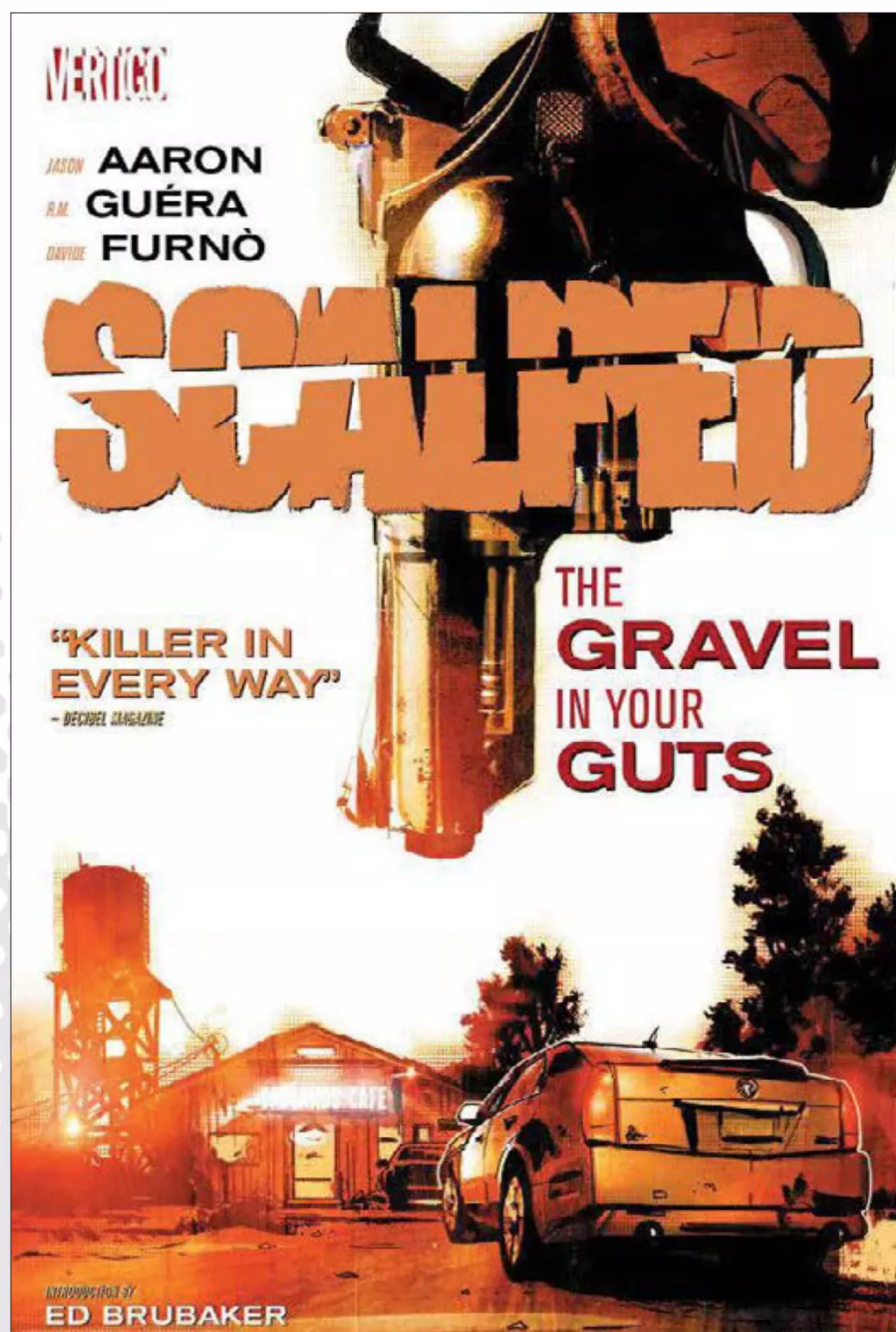
Details Originally published *Scalped* #21-24 (2009) **Publisher** DC/Vertigo **Writer** Jason Aaron
Artist Davide Furno, RM Guera **Collected in** *Scalped: Vol 4 - The Gravel in Your Guts*
Available digitally Comixology

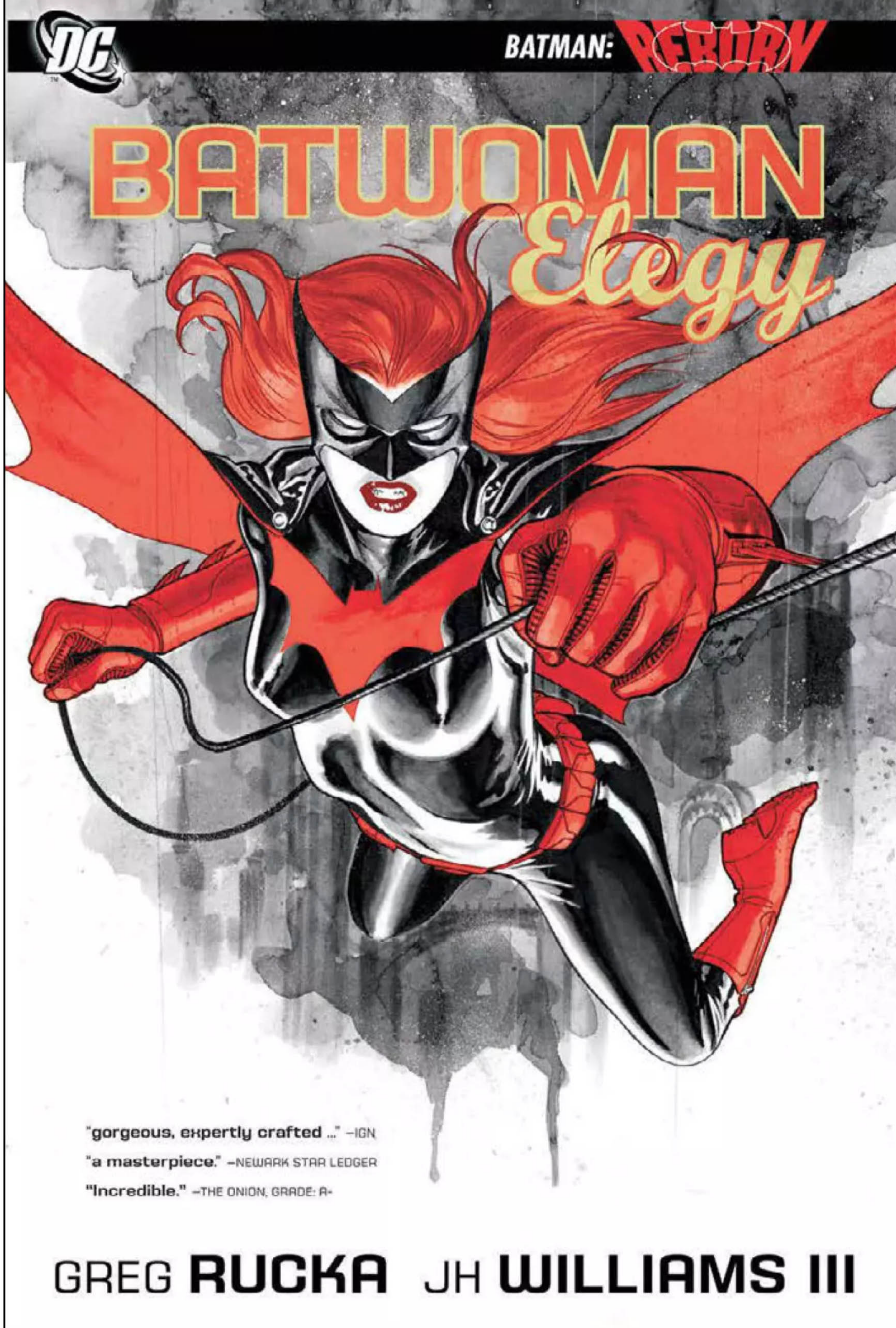
Scalped: The Gravel in Your Guts is a searingly perceptive treatment of what it means to sell out as an ethnic minority in contemporary America. It's no longer a choice between doing the right thing and assimilating, but rather between doing the right thing and preventing one's people from dying.

Lincoln Red Crow, chief of the Prairie Rose reservation, is charged with purifying the soul of his dead ex-lover. To that end, he must lead a non-violent life – which means allowing a gang enforcer to torture and murder Prairie Rose residents without retribution.



The task leads him to try and reconcile the ghosts of his idealistic, activist past with his crime-filled present, knowing that any choice will come at great personal cost to himself or to those in his care. It's a gut-wrenching exploration of a broken social system that leaves no room for principles: only survival and damnation.





BATWOMAN: ELEGY

Details Originally published Detective Comics #854-860, (2009)

Publisher DC Comics **Writer** Greg Rucka **Artist** JH Williams III

Collected in Batwoman: Elegy **Available digitally** Comixology, iBookstore, Kindle

Greg Rucka's Batwoman is every inch the hero that Bruce Wayne is. Yet, she seems so much more in *Elegy*: an openly gay hero, Batwoman has the potential to break new grounds in comic lore, and Rucka makes good use of her sexuality in a non-patronising, non-clichéd way – this is visible in the semi-psychedelic way he charts her journey from military-family invisible kid to masked vigilante, never afraid to mix sexual themes with traditional superhero melodrama (invariably to good effect).

The artwork of JH Williams III helps galvanise the stylish and sleek feel of DC's New 52 *Batwoman* – Williams fuses the ultraviolence in the comic's pages with enough masterful artwork and a surreal edge that makes the comic feel unique. You can read *Batwoman* without any grounding in *Batman* lore and still enjoy the work for its accessibility, its style and its bravery in confronting taboo subject matter.

**"BATWOMAN IS EVERY BIT
THE HERO BATMAN IS"**



THE DEATH OF CAPTAIN MARVEL

Details Originally published The Death Of Captain Marvel (1982)

Publisher Marvel **Writer** Jim Starlin **Artist** Jim Starlin **Collected in** The Death Of Captain Marvel **Available digitally** Marvel Unlimited

Originally published as a bespoke graphic novel in November 1982, *The Death Of Captain Marvel* is a watershed moment for mainstream comics as this powerful cosmic crusader, his friends and loved ones, rail against and then accept his slow and inglorious passing, not in battle with his arch-foe Thanos, but from the incredibly human hands of cancer.

Starlin did something truly amazing with *The Death Of Captain Marvel*, not only in writing the first paradigm-shattering superhero deconstruction, but also by coupling it with a simultaneous superhero reconstruction – long before the small world/big world motif of Mark Waid and Alex Ross's *Kingdom Come*. Just as Mar-Vell the man dies, as any other, and those he knows grieve and rage, Mar-Vell the idea and the icon grows bigger and brighter.

No superhero death that followed, no matter how high profile could match the raw impact and heartache of reading this slim volume for the first time.

MARVEL
GRAPHIC
NOVEL
\$5.95

THE DEATH OF CAPTAIN MARVEL



by JIM STARLIN



"NO SUPERHERO DEATH THAT FOLLOWED COULD MATCH THE RAW IMPACT"





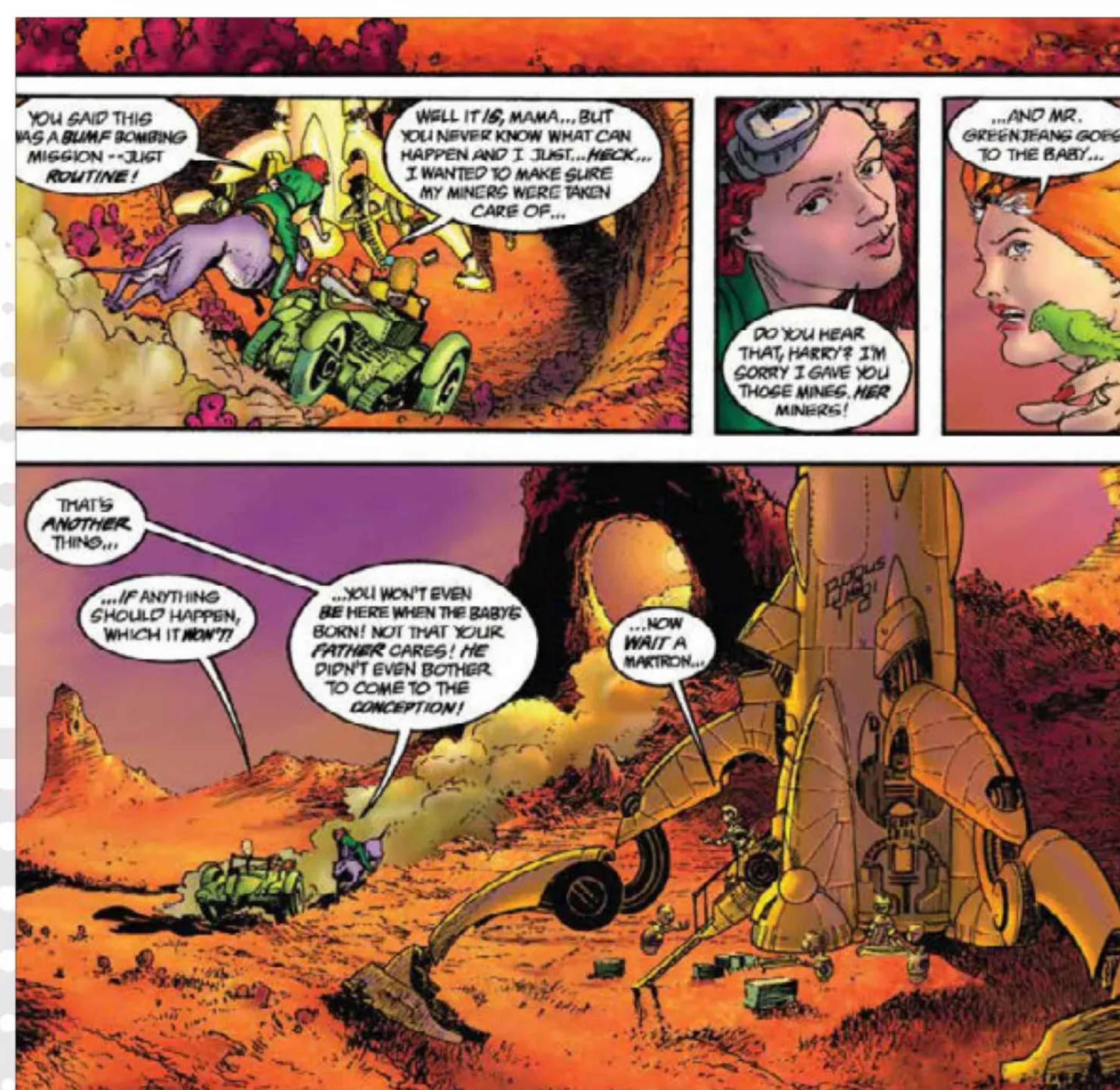
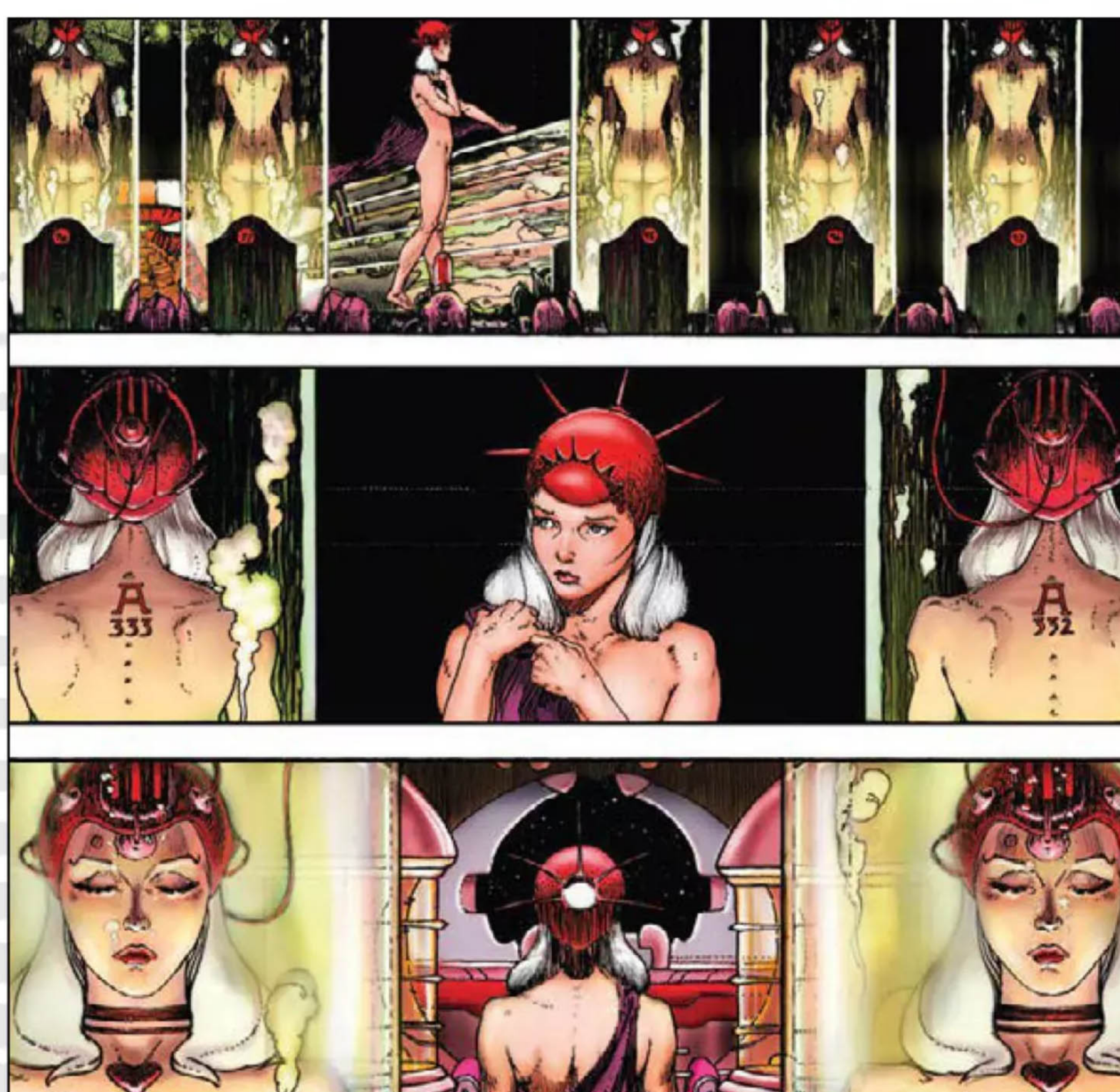
STARSTRUCK

Details Originally published Starstruck #1-13 (1990) **Publisher** IDW
Writer Elaine Lee **Artist** Michael Wm Kaluta, Lee Moyer **Collected in**
 Starstruck Deluxe Edition **Available digitally** Comixology

Watchmen was hailed for its revolutionary storytelling techniques. But several years earlier, a critically acclaimed but greatly overlooked sci-fi epic beat Moore's comic to the punch on almost every innovation: non-linear storytelling, fractal story threads, overlapping dialogue, subtextual themes, recurring symbolism and incredible complexity.

Beginning life as a play, writer Elaine Lee and artist Michael Wm Kaluta saw the potential of the emerging world of mainstream independent comics as a perfect home for their enormous mythos. Set far in the future with humanity in all corners of the universe, a great stage is set with anarchic factions and revolutionary leaders on all sides. Galatia 9 and Brucilla the Muscle, a guerrilla amazon and hothead pilot, are our main protagonists alongside Erotic Ann, a pleasure droid that achieves awareness.

Starstruck truly defies description – it remains one of the greatest comics ever created, and will be of particular interest to fans of Grant Morrison's more brain-melting titles.

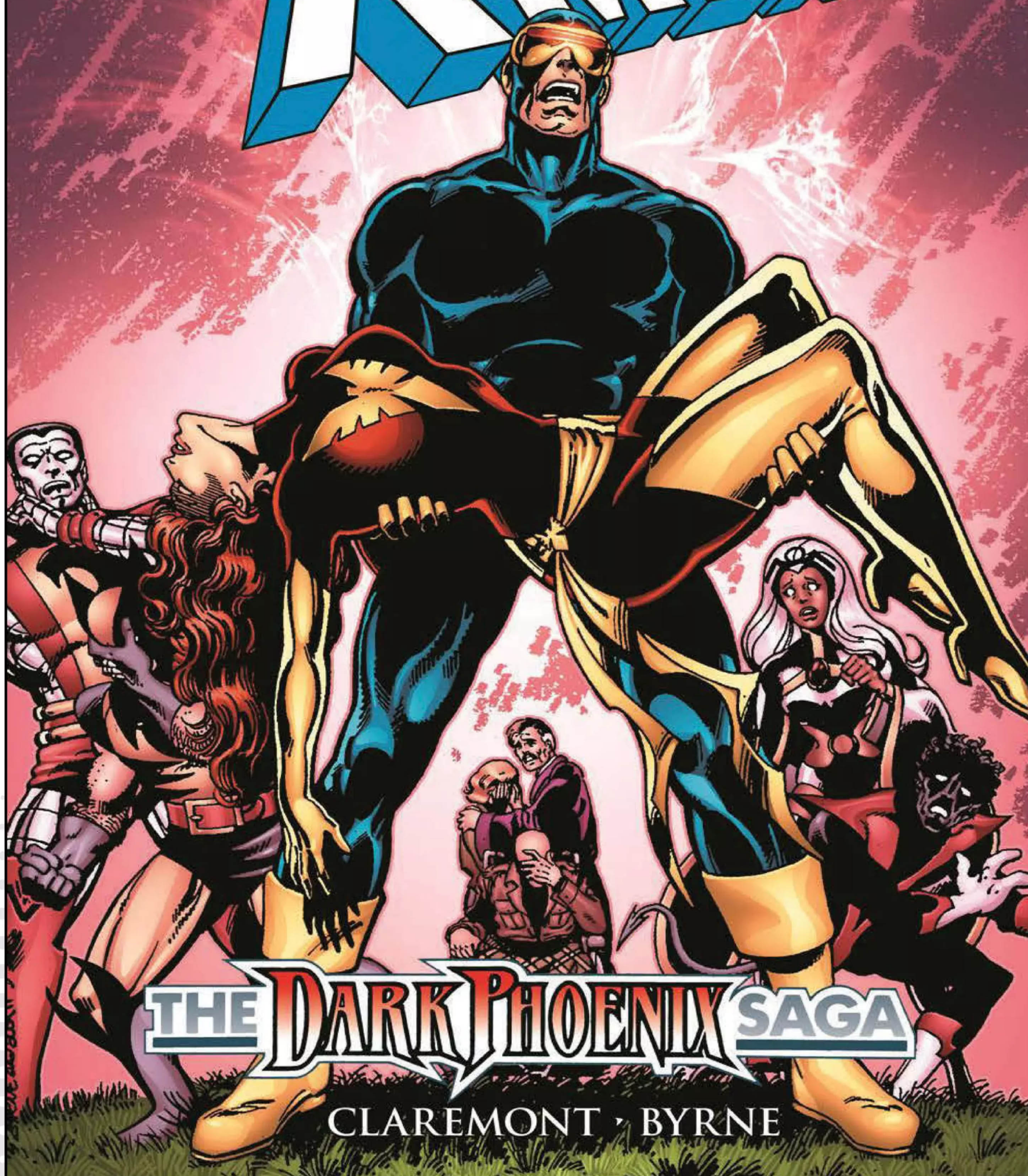


MARVEL

Greatest Comics

THE UNCANNY

X-MEN



UNCANNY X-MEN: THE DARK PHOENIX SAGA

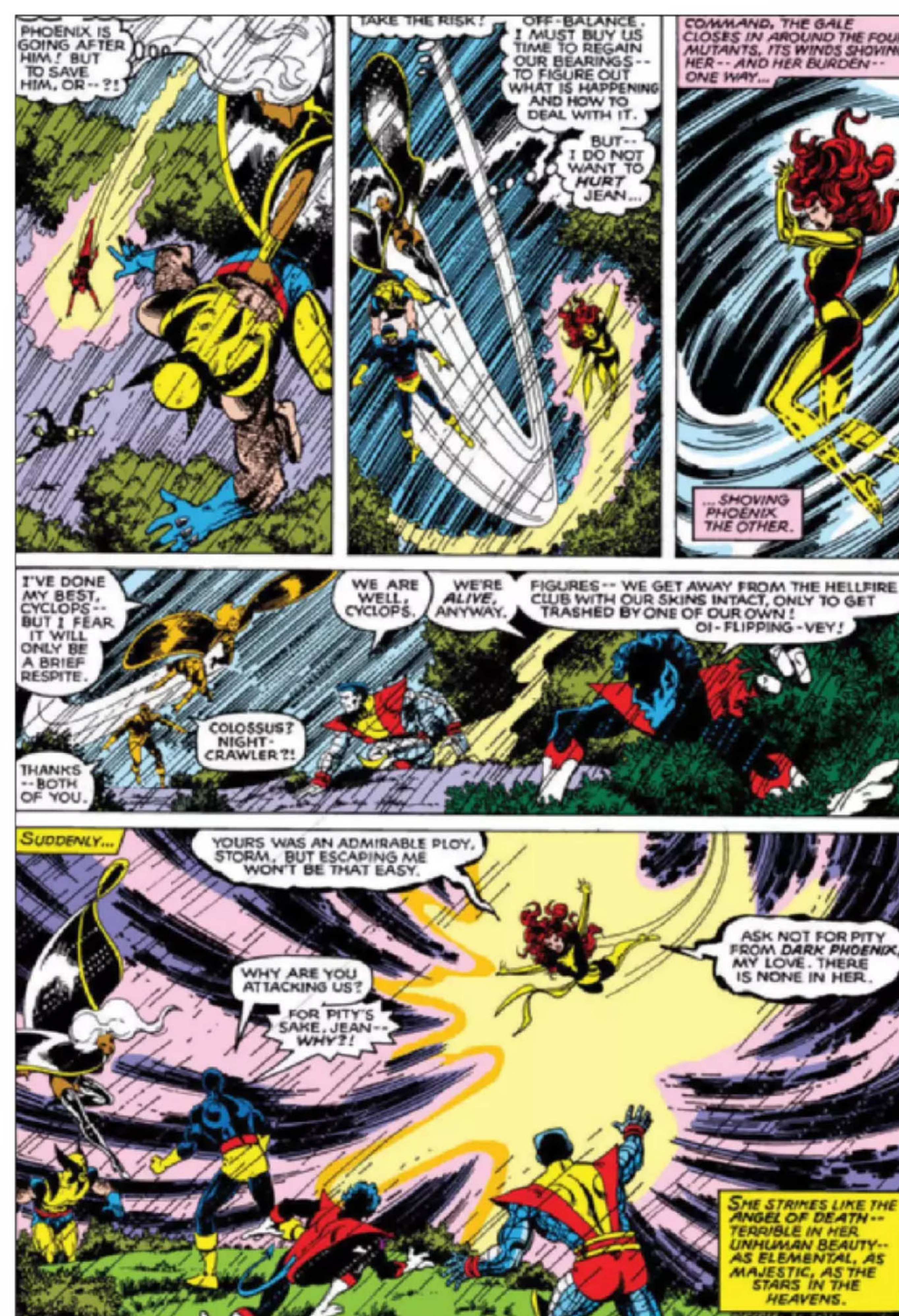
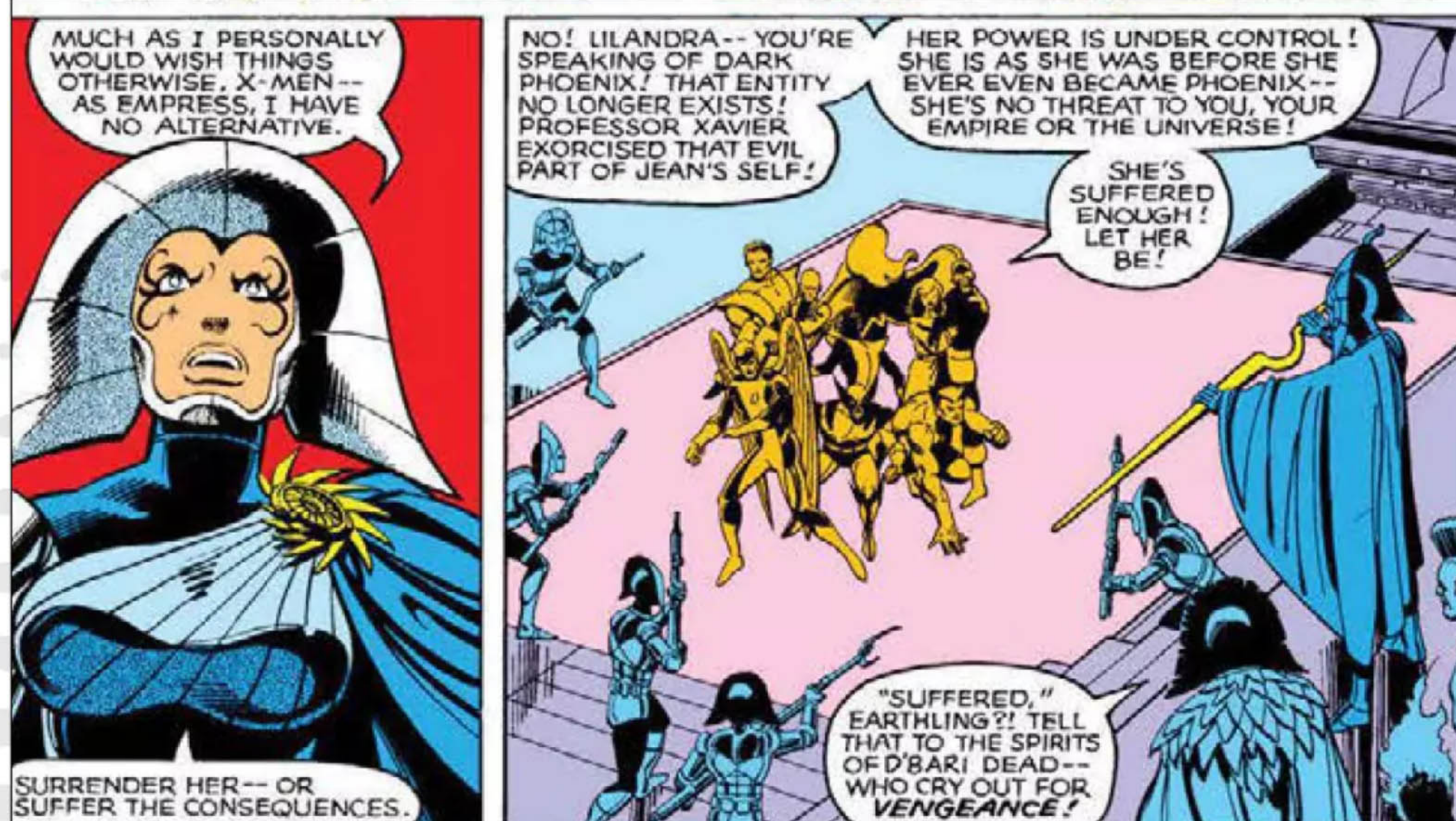
Details Originally published Uncanny X-Men #129-138 (1980) **Publisher** Marvel Comics **Writer** Chris Claremont
Artist Jack Kirby **Collected in** Uncanny X-Men: Dark Phoenix Saga **Available digitally** Comixology/Marvel Unlimited

Few characters sum up Chris Claremont's journey on *X-Men* quite like Jean Grey. Once the demure Marvel Girl, the sole woman in the original team whose role was to be kidnapped or pined for by the many males on the team, Jean had become the potent host of an intergalactic force of destruction.

No longer the 'best gal-pal' of the 'world's strangest teens', she became the tragic heart of an epic. Intoxicated by power, she abuses it and is forced to pay the price. Jean may have been resurrected – as indeed have many of the characters whose deaths make this list – but the truly great stories cast long shadows.

From here on in the X-Men became an unstoppable force, sitting atop the comic charts for two decades, spawning animated series and eventually movies.

A decade earlier, the *Uncanny X-Men* had been threatened with cancellation. Now they rose like a phoenix...

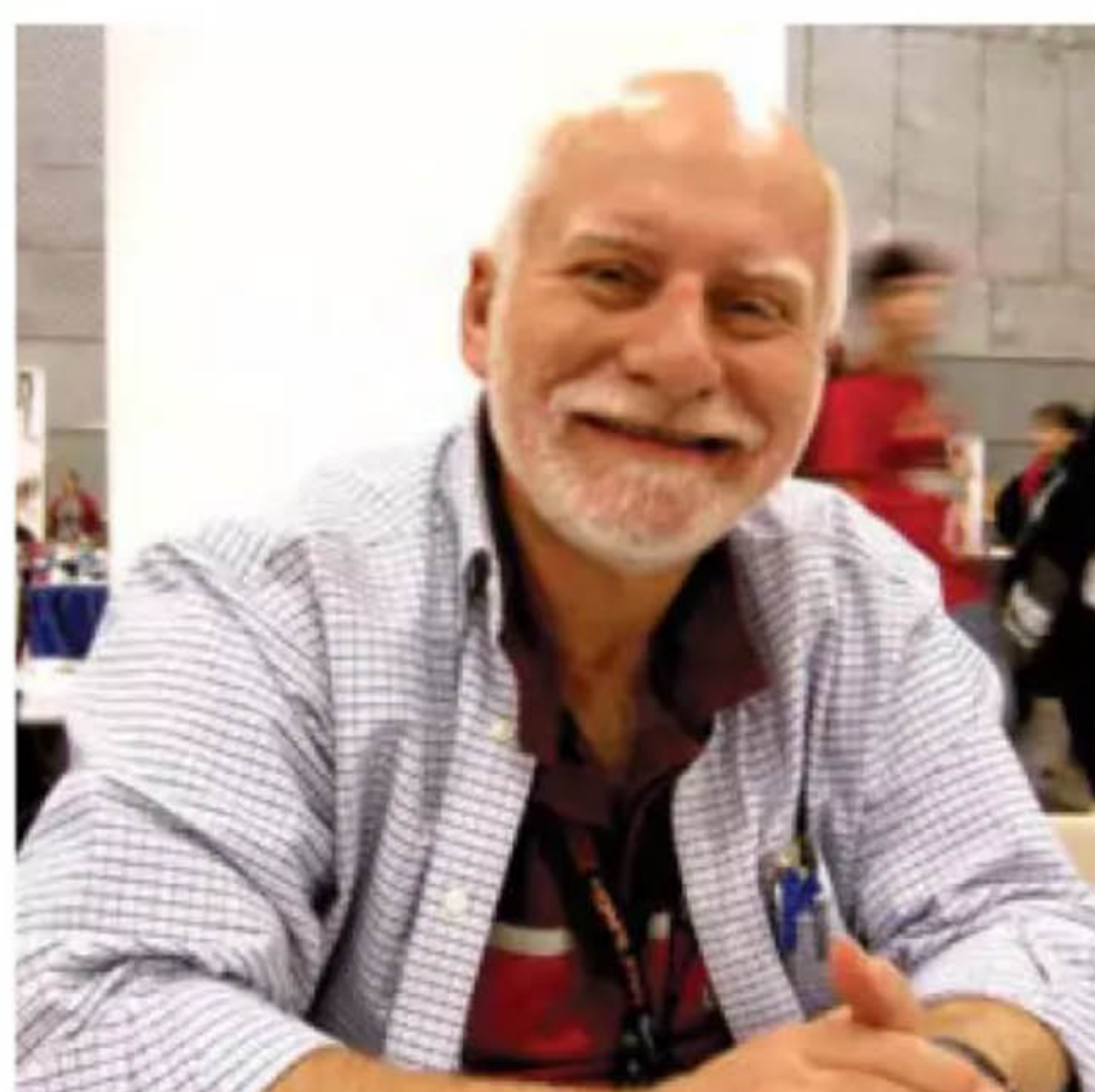


"JEAN GREY BECAME THE TRAGIC HEART OF AN EPIC"



UNCANNY CLAREMONT

Having paved his way with over 200 characters in his career, Chris Claremont remains one of the most engaging comic writers of our time. We spoke to him about his influence on female characters, the X-Men films and his long-time love of Sir Ian McKellen



Claremont has seen his own storylines realised on the big screen.

In the current day and age, it is easy to see how comic books are influencing the world of film and television. With Marvel building their own interwebbing Cinematic Universe, DC heralding the TV crown, it's easy to forget that these long-established characters have been around for quite some time.

Long before we felt like we were BFFs with Steve Rogers, or engaged in the story of the teenage mutants at Xavier's School, these characters were born. It's hard to think back in the Seventies, a world we now know so well could have long since diminished into nothing had *Uncanny X-Men* not be revitalised. On the brink of being cancelled for good, enter a young Chris Claremont. In 1975 he was brought on board to the X-Men Strato-jet, he turned what was a failing title into a flagship identity. In his 16 years on the title – the longest ever run on a comic title – Claremont upturned the common one woman to five men ratio, made Storm the leader of the X-Men, introduced 200 characters and accidentally created his own trope, 'The Claremont Woman'.

British-born, American-raised, Claremont was no stranger to feeling like a fish out of water. something he drew on in his many years writing the mutants. Like he did with so many other elements of his every day life; from his wish to be an actor to the strong female influences that surrounded him.

From the beginning, Claremont made a significant dent in the way in which female characters were presented in comic strips. The Jean Grey that we know and love today is a far cry from where she started. Little more than some eye-candy for the male mutants, 'Marvel Girl' – as she was then known – served little purpose. It was Claremont and his team that converted her into the dynamic Phoenix. Working alongside artist Dave Cockrum – the original artist of Storm, Rogue and many others – and fellow writer, and plotter Len Wein. "The initial impulse was to find a way to take the sole distaff member of the

team and redefine her to what we hoped was a full potential of her abilities, or a full expression of her potential abilities and see what happened next... we set the ball rolling, as it were, and didn't quite realise until it caught up to us and ran us over that we'd actually hit the motherlode."

But Claremont and Cockrum didn't know where their changes were going to take them, and certainly hadn't counted on them creating an iconic superhero. "I think we always had hopes, but I don't think any of us had thought at that point of how it would turn out in the end." Where DC had the likes of Wonder Woman, Marvel struggled to come up with a response. "Marvel at that point, I don't think, really had an iconic female lead character. They were always the girlfriend, the wife, and sort of only on the sidelines, a cool character but never got a centre stage shot, much like Black Widow."

Yet this wouldn't do for Claremont. "To me – and to Dave, I think – Phoenix hit the motherlode. At a time when the book was becoming increasingly popular with women readers, Jean sort of set the stage for many of the archival characters that followed."

But Jean wasn't Claremont's only contribution into strong female characters. In his 17-year tenure on *Uncanny X-Men* he introduced Rogue, Jubilee, Psylocke and Mystique, along with many others. Yet when asked if he feels he has had an influence on other types of media and their representation of women, he takes a backseat. "You could say that it derives simply from watching Katharine Hepburn run through a succession of films from the Thirties to the Seventies. You've got *The Lion In The Winter*, you've got Peter O'Toole, you've got Katharine Hepburn, that's a fight worth watching. Again, you go back in fiction – and reality – you can find as dynamic a paradigm of hero, monarch, villain you name it on both sides of the gender gap."

This attitude of Claremont's was almost unfathomable in the Seventies, so many other writers around him didn't consider having a team of characters that ➤





The Claremont Woman

TEN OF THE BEST FEMALE CHARACTERS CLAREMONT CREATED AND DEVELOPED



Kitty Pryde

Uncanny X-Men #129 (1980)

Kitty was the youngest mutant to be indoctrinated into the X-Men. She went on to become an out and proud mutant President of the US.



Jean Grey

X-Men #1 (1963)

Claremont took Jean from the 'eye candy' to one of the most powerful X-Men as Phoenix. Perhaps his most notable development of a character.



Emma Frost

Uncanny X-Men #129 (1980)

Frost started off as an enemy of the X-Men and became a part of the team. She possesses telepathy and an invulnerable diamond form.



Mystique

Ms Marvel #16 (1978)

Able to shapeshift into any other human form, Mystique often holds all the cards and is difficult to defeat. She's ageless and kick-ass.



Storm

Giant-Size X-Men #1 (1975)

Brought to the forefront by Claremont, Storm took down Cyclops and became the leader of the X-Men all without her powers.



Psylocke

Captain Britain Vol 1 #8 (1976)

Twin sister of Captain Britain, Psylocke had many incarnations of her powers before having her mind input into a Japanese ninja.



Jubilee

Uncanny X-Men #244 (1989)

Jubilee was the youngest member of the team in the Nineties, she has kick-ass pyrotechnic powers and is a talented gymnast.



Madelyne Pryor

Uncanny X-Men #168 (1983)

Originally Scott Summers (Cyclops) love interest and wife, the last straw was finding out she was a Jean Grey clone and she turned to the dark side.



Rachel Summers

Uncanny X-Men #141 (1981)

The daughter of Jean Grey and Scott Summers (Cyclops), Rachel inherited her mother's immense powers and eventually her codenames.



➤ included more than a couple of women, yet Claremont didn't even blink when it came to making Storm, not only an important member of the X-Men team, but their leader. "Having a woman in a position of power didn't seem as implausible to me as it did perhaps to others, but that perhaps grew out of the fact that I know too many dynamic, alpha character women in my own life. You could look at Eleanor of Aquitaine, you could look at the two Elizabeths, England hasn't been too shy in that regard either, as having not simply a strong figurehead leader, but a strong, active, aggressive monarch. You know, give it a shot, see what happens, and it worked. Aside from the fact that the tradition that Ororo comes out of the Central African monarchy community, she was just such a cool character... Part of the reason for her taking centre stage as official leader of the team was she did it at the time when she had no superpowers... That was a little bit to demonstrate, not only was she cool, she really was the best at what she did, not to show that she was better than men, but she was the best person for the job."

Claremont isn't shy of expressing how easy he found it to write these women. "I just swiped from [real life]. One of my best friends is a Pulitzer Prize winning, Humboldt prize winner. You name it, she's got it. She's got three presidents on speed dial. She hunts Ebola, you know, she has her own mop suit, she heads up into the reaches of Central Africa to find out what makes the bug tick, and she thinks *I'm cool* because I write comic books? That's absurd."

"Another one of my best friends: I woke up one morning to hear her on the radio with her partner in Sarajevo and she's shouting at him to duck because they're being fired at by snipers and you can hear the bullets go by. When you know people that do that for a living, the natural writer instinct is to swipe as many of those elements as possible and put them in the book and why not let the dust fall where it may. It got to the point where I defined my own cliché, 'Oh, it's a Claremont woman!' Well, tough luck!"

It is because of this move to create female characters that actually meant something to the readers and other characters alike, that we have been blessed with so many writers following suit. In an interview with *Time Magazine* Joss Whedon stated, "Kitty was a huge proto-Buffy. I mean, there was no other you could point to as strongly," and when it came to him writing his own X-Men comic, *Astonishing X-Men* (see page 94) he said that being allowed to write Kitty was



The movies' depiction of Wolverine owes a lot to Claremont.

one of three reasons he took on the project.

On being an inspiration to other people Claremont said: "On one hand it feels

incredibly delightful. On the other hand it is a source of ongoing and indescribable frustration, because everyone *but* me gets to play with [the characters]." It is from this frustration – and a need not to influence his own continuity – that Claremont rarely reads other's work. "I could read an Alan Moore story and go 'Oh my god that is sodding brilliant' and then the next thing is 'Oh, how can I do that better?' It's just the nature of the game replay, so I try to keep my distance, and if I'm not actively writing a series I really try not to read because my sense of what I would do with the continuity and where the characters would go can be very much at odds with what's at play, or has been in play in the past. It's easier to read and enjoy non-conflicting material."

Being the father of so many *X-Men* creations, his sense of his characters is something that comes across constantly when he speaks. There is an air of adoration in his voice, especially when talking of the influential Kitty Pryde. In his mind, he has a set idea of the fundamentals behind each character. "There is a very specific timeline

on how her life strings out and how old she is. So me writing the characters, I haven't seen any logic in aging

them significantly." He goes on

to say: "It provides a lot more opportunity to experiment, to muck things up, to try unexpected pathways, and in the process, try as much as possible to keep them fresh and new. Once you throw someone into their twenties... You start realising, if you put yourself in the mid-set of a character, 'Why am I running around in skintights? Shouldn't I be getting a job? Shouldn't I be looking at the natural progression of life?'"

Keeping the characters young not only provides him with a good scope on story and development for them, but it also provides the audience with a grounding point to the story. When Kitty first appears in the comics she is 13 years old, and a solid starting point for the reader to access the rest of the team along with her.

That is something for which Claremont holds Marvel in high regard. Their collective of characters is much more approachable than other publishing houses. "You run down the list of the Justice League pantheon; you've got the sole survivor of an alien race, you've got one of the premier ➤

"HAVING A WOMAN IN A POSITION OF POWER DIDN'T SEEM AS IMPLAUSIBLE TO ME AS IT DID PERHAPS TO OTHERS..."

CHRIS CLAREMONT

➤ multi-billionaires in the world, you've got an Amazon demi-goddess, oh wait, you've got Green Arrow *another* billionaire! You've got Green Lantern, okay, he's a test pilot but he's got the magic ring. You've got Aquaman, hey, Lord of Atlantis. These are seven guys at the top of the foodchain. These are fortune 500, fortune 50, guys and gals. Whereas Peter Parker was a college student, Matt Murdoch was a working lawyer, Tony Stark was a billionaire, but before was a [PhD] doctor. The Marvel pantheon had a real world sense of how you fit in and how you move ahead." They are a bunch of characters who live in the 'real' world, they're making their everyday lives in New York or Chicago, recognisable places that the reader can visualise the same as everybody else, compared to Gotham, Metropolis and Starling City of DC's roster. The characters have been created as 'fish out of water', introduced into a surreal part of the world in such a way that allows the reader to easily access the same emotions.

"It was easier with the mutants and my *Uncanny* team than it was with the original five because they were so desperate to begin with," he explains, "it was much as a learning experience for me as it was for the characters. Whereas if you look at Scott and Jean, Bobby and Warren and Hank, they were all middle-class white folk from somewhere in the US, there wasn't much difference between them." But it doesn't stop with the white middle classes, Marvel have set a new precedent with the most recent incarnation of Miss Marvel. "I think that is also the reason why the new Miss Marvel has struck a very resonate chord because who has ever see a young, Islamic, female action hero and how do you reconcile the potential desperate elements of character and role. That to me is fodder for a whole bunch of really neat stories and I look forward to seeing how that plays out... it also enables you to come up with solutions that will intrigue the readers and keep them coming back, which is the ultimate goal."

Comics and graphic novels have been one output where all kinds of supposedly controversial matters have been covered over the years. Starting with the feminist stances of Claremont's first days, to introducing heroes of all shapes and sizes. "The fish out of water aspect is an element of the character and the series that sadly is as relevant today as it was when I wrote it and also applies to a much boarder and more varied panel of readers. We have had fans among Mormons even more specifically, Mormon women. If you're on the outside looking in this has always been a series that seemed to reach out to that class of people, I suppose. Just looking [what] is happening in Europe with refugee immigration from Africa in the last six months even, it's a surprisingly relevant topic in the sense of how do you assimilate people who might consider themselves

"NOT ONLY WAS SHE COOL, SHE REALLY WAS THE BEST AT WHAT SHE DID, NOT TO SHOW THAT SHE WAS BETTER THAN MEN, BUT SHE WAS THE BEST PERSON FOR THE JOB"

CHRIS CLAREMONT

irreconcilable outsiders, into a mainstream. And how do you address the fact that the mainstream might feel they are being overwhelmed by these new arrivals. That is a conflict that has always been relevant in human history and often with tragic consequences. So comics is a cheap, but, if done right, surprisingly effective way of addressing that question of conflict and trying to find a resolution and that has always been the X-Men's primary theme. How do we fit in?"

"When I was doing a future history of the X-Men, *X-Men: The End*, Kitty's role was leaving the X-Men and running as Mayor for Chicago and then Governor of Illinois and eventually President of the United States. She was no longer hiding who she was and saying 'I am what I am, vote for me or not. This is what I stand for.' Then the ultimate punch line, in my own continuity is she is overthrown by the sentinels. And things get even more absurd, but that to me that is a possible future that we can hypothesise about, but the reality, we need to stay anchored in a more identifiable present."

But it's not just the ladies that Claremont has influenced when it comes to the world of comics. When you think of *X-Men* villains, one of the first names that will come to mind is the magnetic

field-controlling Magneto. Played on screen by the somewhat legendary Ian McKellen, and a role that helped to make Michael Fassbender a household name, Claremont took the pre-existing character and developed him into the Holocaust survivor that we know him as today. But it's not seeing how important Magneto has become that has most impressed Claremont. As a young man, he dreamt of being an actor, and when McKellan would go to Broadway to lead a masterclass called Acting Shakespeare, he'd attend. "I use to sit in the audience and take notes and think 'This is a craft that I want to practise' so to end up 30 years later meeting him on set of the *X-Men* it was a delight and coming back 5 years later to do another gig and he remembered it, that's totally cool!"

Seeing the character of Magneto come alive on screen struck a pleasant chord with Claremont. "I remember looking at *X-Men: First Class* and seeing this moment which derives slightly from one of the stories that I've written where Magento walks into a bar in Patagonia and three Nazis look up and I'm sitting there 'Screw the rest of the film, I want to see two hours of this!' Magneto is James Bond for crying out loud, you've got Fassbender, you've got the look, you've got it all there, run with it! Let's see where it leads and have Charlie come in at the end.

Seeing Magneto personified by Sir Ian McKellen was a particular highlight for Claremont.



"The fan geek in my soul looking at this and going 'Oh man you could do so much with this, with these performers, with this material, with this back story.' That's the challenge."

Claremont speaks very highly of the work that Bryan Singer [director of the original X-trilogy and the prequels] has done with his characters, "I've known Bryan Singer for, I suspect, longer than either of us would care to admit. [I was] part of the original negotiations with him with Marvel with Fox with the producer back in 1998... I know his work, he certainly knows mine. All you have to do to get a sense of how correctly the X-Men are approached is to look at the casting of it," he enthuses, "Even with the original constraints Fox had on the film in terms of the budget, they got a hell of a cast. You'd almost think it was a *Harry Potter* film the amount of ability that was running through it. When you've got Michael Fassbender on one end and Ian McKellan on the other, Patrick Stewart and James McAvoy at the other and Hugh Jackman

at the centre of it all. Who is going to complain? There is absolutely no reason to complain.

"You've got such a breath of talent and ability that, you know, just with the sheer brilliance of casting Peter Dinklage as Bolivar Trask it's like 'Cool!' It has a synergy of talent, it's just breath taking and I guess that the

real world way to judge that is to just look at the amount of accolades they have earned in one way or another. You've got two best actresses, a couple of best supporting actresses, you've got Oscars Emmys, Oliviers...

People who have their knighthood, people who will get their knighthood. I can't wait to see what happens next."

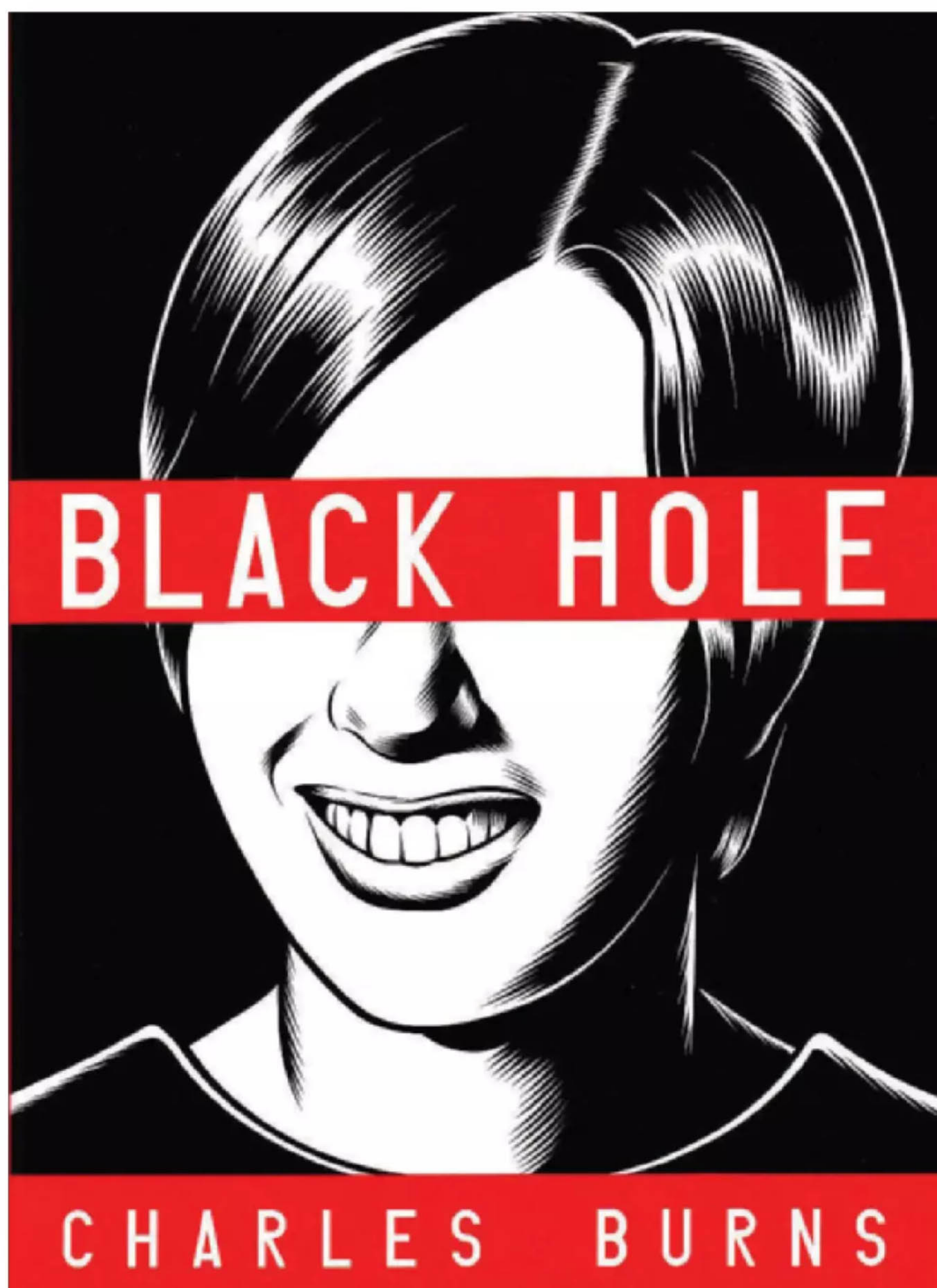
And of seeing *Game Of Throne's* Sophie Turner as a young Jean Grey in 2016's *X-Men: Apocalypse*? "It will be intriguing, somebody I'm used to seeing as Sansa Stark as Jean Grey and how that turns out. I look at it, and I think 'Hang on, he's got 120 minutes give or take, he's got *Apocalypse*, he's

got potentially the end of the world as we know it, he's got more X-Men than we know what to do with and that's just the ones who have already been created."

If anything, Claremont finds the use of his characters inspiring, and enjoys seeing them come to life before his eyes. "The thing is, you can bring the character to life and the real giggle is *seeing* them come to life... And that in turn inspires a whole list of other ideas. Well if they can do this then maybe we can do *that*. It's a synergy."

When *Apocalypse* comes out next year it will be going head-to-head with DC's *Batman V Superman: Dawn Of Justice*, "Joss [Whedon, writer/director of *Avengers: Age Of Ultron*] has raised the bar so ridiculously high at this point. It used to be \$300, \$400 million used to be an adequate [laughs] return in investment on your movie. *Furious 7* has sold a billion dollars in tickets. That's ridiculous! I mean, god bless Vin Diesel, but gee whiz! But that raises the bar for *Avengers*, and you know, one assessment is 'Yeah, well *Avengers* is going to a billion and a half in the opening week'. *Star Wars* will do that in the opening weekend. *Star Wars* is going to break the bank. But that in turn is going to raise the bar *immensely* for *Batman V Superman* next year. And *Batman V Superman* is going up against *Apocalypse*." His conclusion? "It's an adventure."





BLACK HOLE

Details Originally published Black Hole #1-12 (1995-2005) **Publisher** Fantagraphics **Writer** Charles Burns
Artist Charles Burns **Collected in** Black Hole **Available digitally** List platforms, ie. Comixology, Marvel Unlimited

Black Hole is equally haunting as it is brilliant. Writer/illustrator Charles Burns transports the reader to seventies Seattle as a mysterious disease begins to sweep across the city, causing strange mutations amongst the local teenage population. Spread through sexual contact, the disease leaves highly visible and grotesque marks on some, while others are left less obviously scarred. If that isn't a metaphor for going through puberty, then we clearly remember our childhoods incorrectly.

But, then again, everything that happens at the dawn of adolescence can have profound and unknown effects on the teenage psyche. The way *Black Hole* delicately explores classic fears of adulthood with a wonderfully considered horror noir vibe is one of its greatest assets, but it's the way it crawls under your skin that will stick with you. *Black Hole* is an incredible work of literature; it has moments that will shock, disturb and confound you. It's an example of what makes this medium so great.



STARMAN: OMNIBUS VOL 1

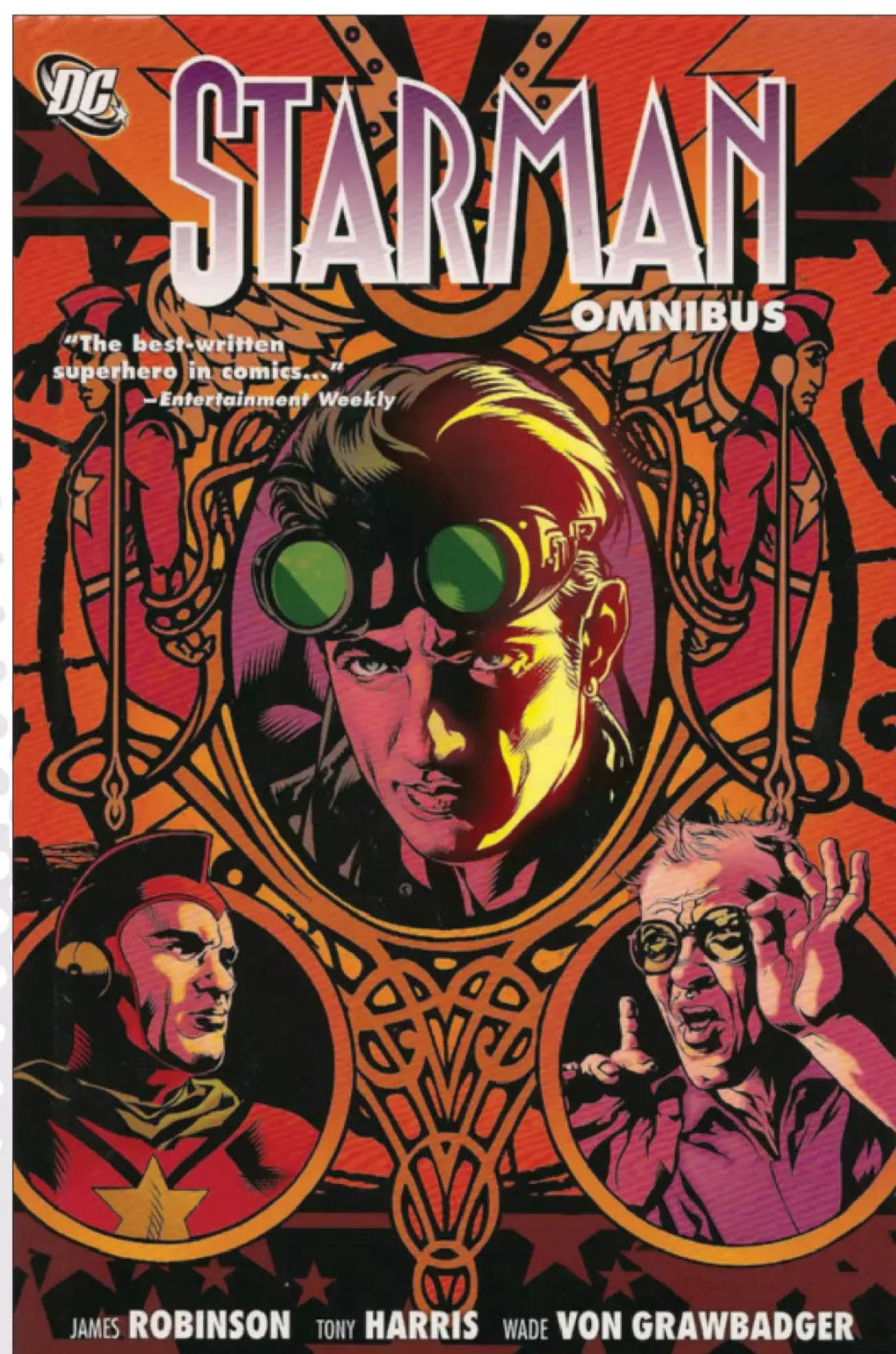
Details Originally published Starman #0-16 (1994-2001) **Publisher** DC **Writer** James Robinson **Artist** Tony Harris
Collected in Starman Omnibus **Available digitally** Comixology

Jack Knight is one of the sons of Ted Knight, the original Starman. His father is a scientist and former superhero, his older brother has taken up the mantle, and Jack... runs a vintage junk shop – until events



conspire to put the most unlikely Knight in the role of family hero.

This is the sweetest book on the list, and certainly the one that hits home the most. Jack is an eminently relatable lead; a little directionless, but good-hearted and desperate to do the right thing. The way Robinson takes him through his hero's journey is as elegant as it is emotionally exhausting, and several issues in the run are deeply moving, beautifully written stuff. Rounded out by the unique and often astonishing artwork of Tony Harrison, this is a book that comes from a rich history, but has a personality all its own – just like Jack himself.



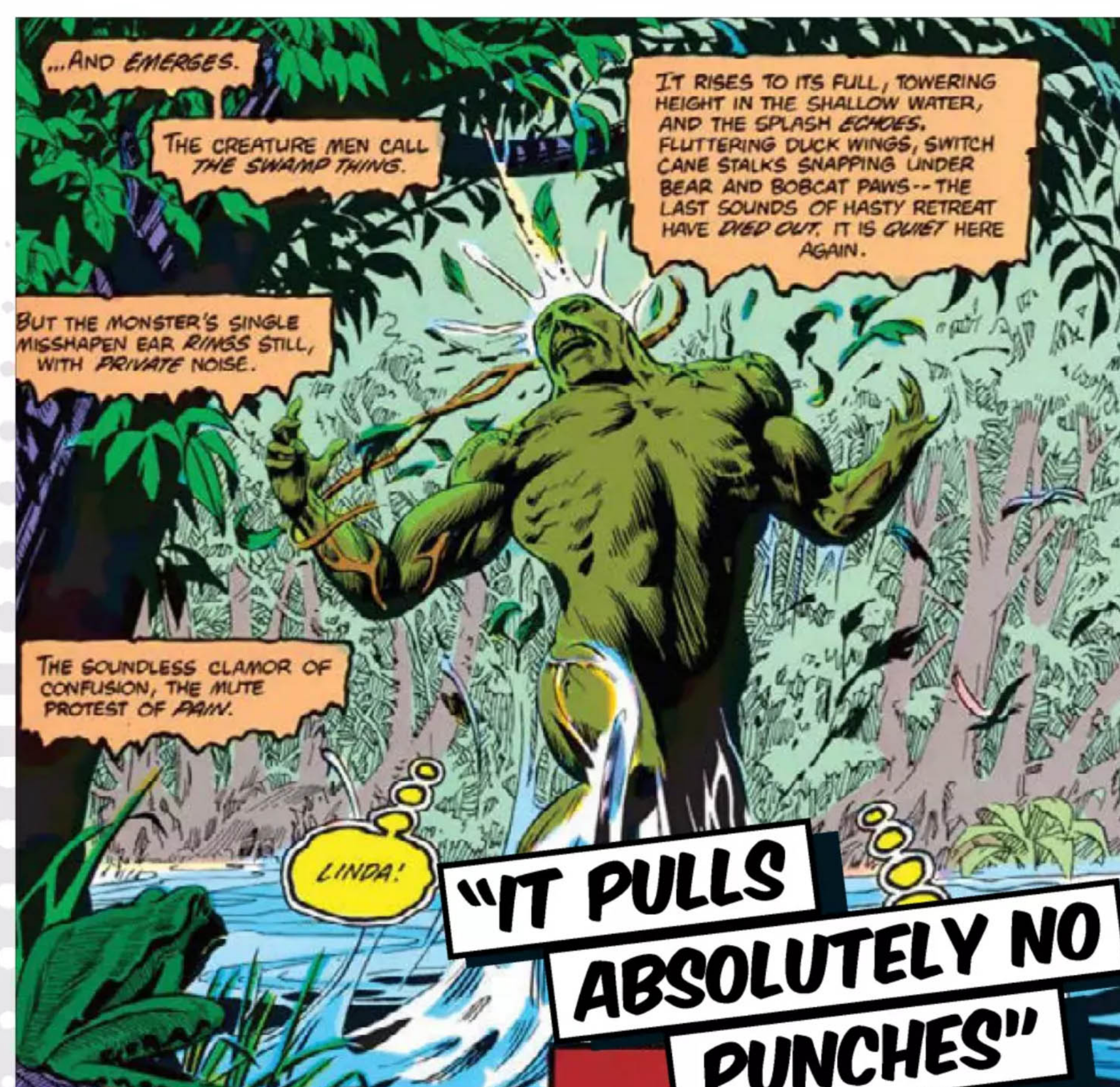
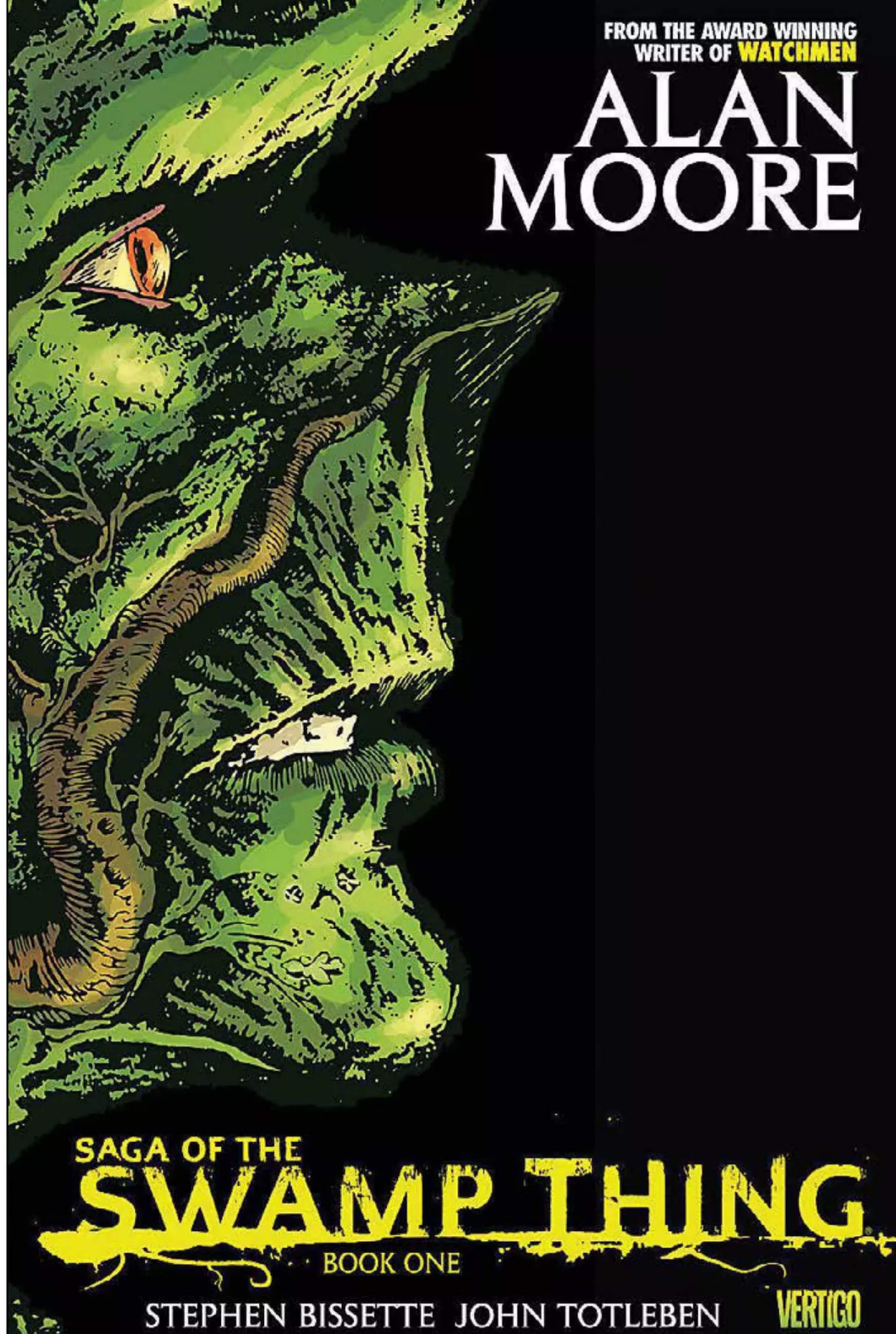
FROM THE AWARD WINNING
WRITER OF **WATCHMEN**
**ALAN
MOORE**

SAGA OF THE SWAMP THING: BOOK ONE

Details Originally published Swamp Thing #21-27 (1984-) **Publisher** DC
Writer Alan Moore **Artists** Steve Bissette, John Totleben **Collected in** Saga Of The
Swamp Thing: Book One **Available digitally** Comixology, Kindle

The patient zero for Vertigo comics, *Swamp Thing* is as rich, complex and loamy as the environment it springs from. Alan Moore, along with artists John Totleben and Steve Bissette, gutted the failing character and rebuilt him as equal parts pagan icon and planetary embodiment. Moore's run worked the character from every angle, exploring his role as a monster, his history with the planet and the odd connection he had maintained with Alec Holland, the scientist who had supposedly become Swamp Thing.

Make no mistake; this is complex, literary stuff, and it pulls absolutely no punches. But this is where it all begins, with the Sandman and John Constantine of *Hellblazer* and *Constantine* both tracing parts of their origins back to this book at this time. 'Classic' is an over-used word, but it's the only one that really applies to these books. Amazing work from start to finish.



The New York Times best-selling author of **American Gods** and **Coraline**

Greatest Comics

NEIL GAIMAN

Volume One

THE SANDMAN & PRELUDES NOCTURNES

Illustrated by
Sam Keith
Mike Dringenberg
Malcolm Jones III

Introduction by
Karen Berger

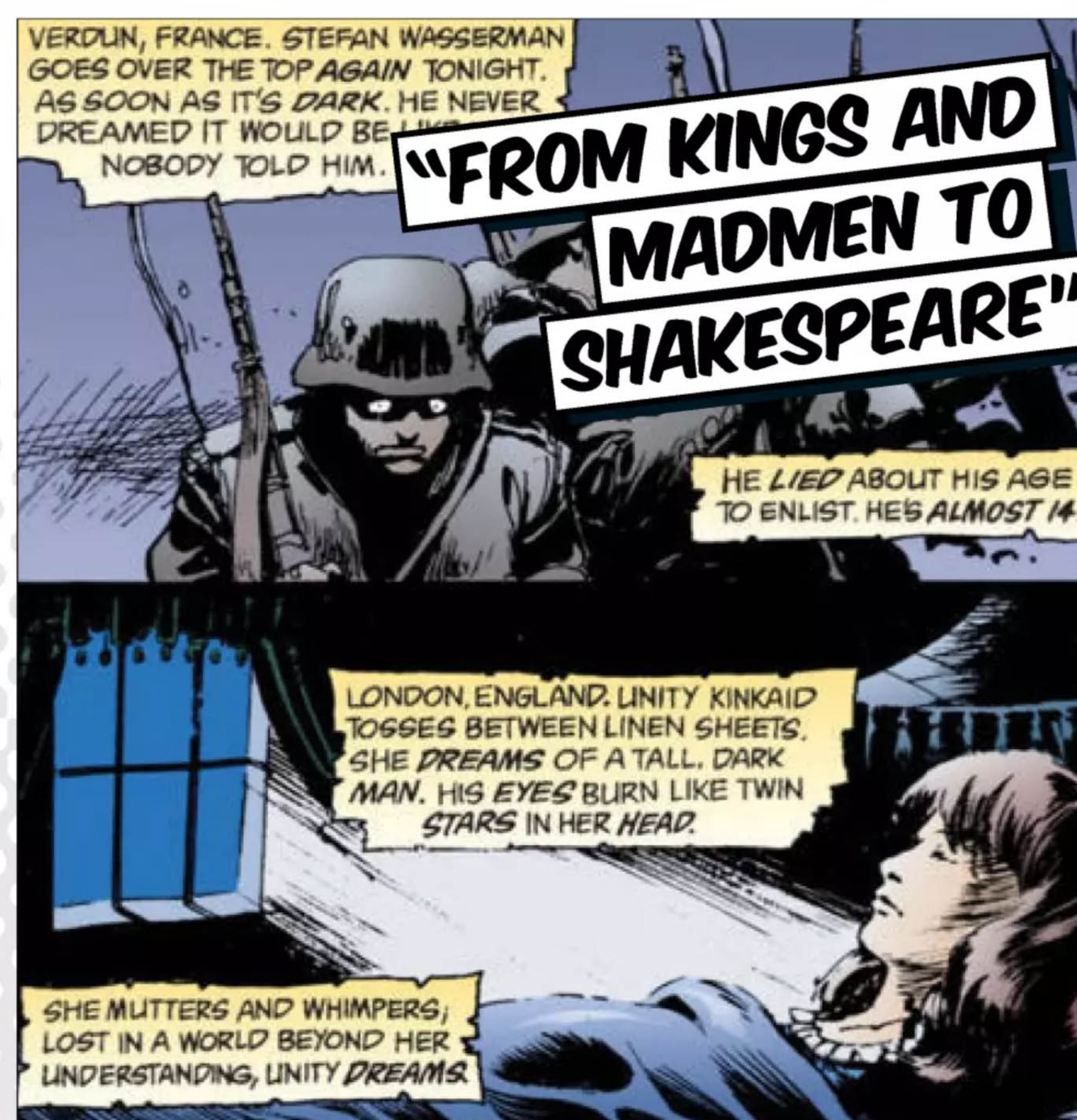
THE SANDMAN: PRELUDES & NOCTURNES

Details Originally published The Sandman #1-8 (1989) **Publisher** Vertigo **Writer** Neil Gaiman **Artist** Various
Collected in The Sandman: Preludes & Nocturnes **Available digitally** Comixology

It's truly a testament to just how good *The Sandman* is that it remains the pinnacle of Neil Gaiman's staggeringly successful career. Taking a lesser-known DC character and creating his own universe, Gaiman was a crucial element of the rise of Vertigo and cerebral mainstream comics.

The Sandman starts, slightly awkwardly, as a horror comic, as Dream of the Endless breaks free of his prison and begins righting the wrongs that occurred in his absence. Gaiman soon drifts away from the nightmarish potential of this premise and explores the incredible possibilities that the god of the unconscious presents him with. Gaiman is helped in his task by a succession of brilliant artists, but special mention must go to long-time collaborator Dave McKean, whose covers perfectly capture the dark majesty and wonder of the central character.

From kings and madmen to Shakespeare and Lucifer, from Hell to New York to the Heart of the Dreaming, Dream's journey is gripping, moving and simply stunning in its scope. It truly does feel endless.



SMILE

**BATMAN
THE
KILLING
JOKER
ALAN MOORE
BRIAN BOLLAND
JOHN HIGGINS**

ISBN: 0-930289-45-5



BATMAN: THE KILLING JOKE

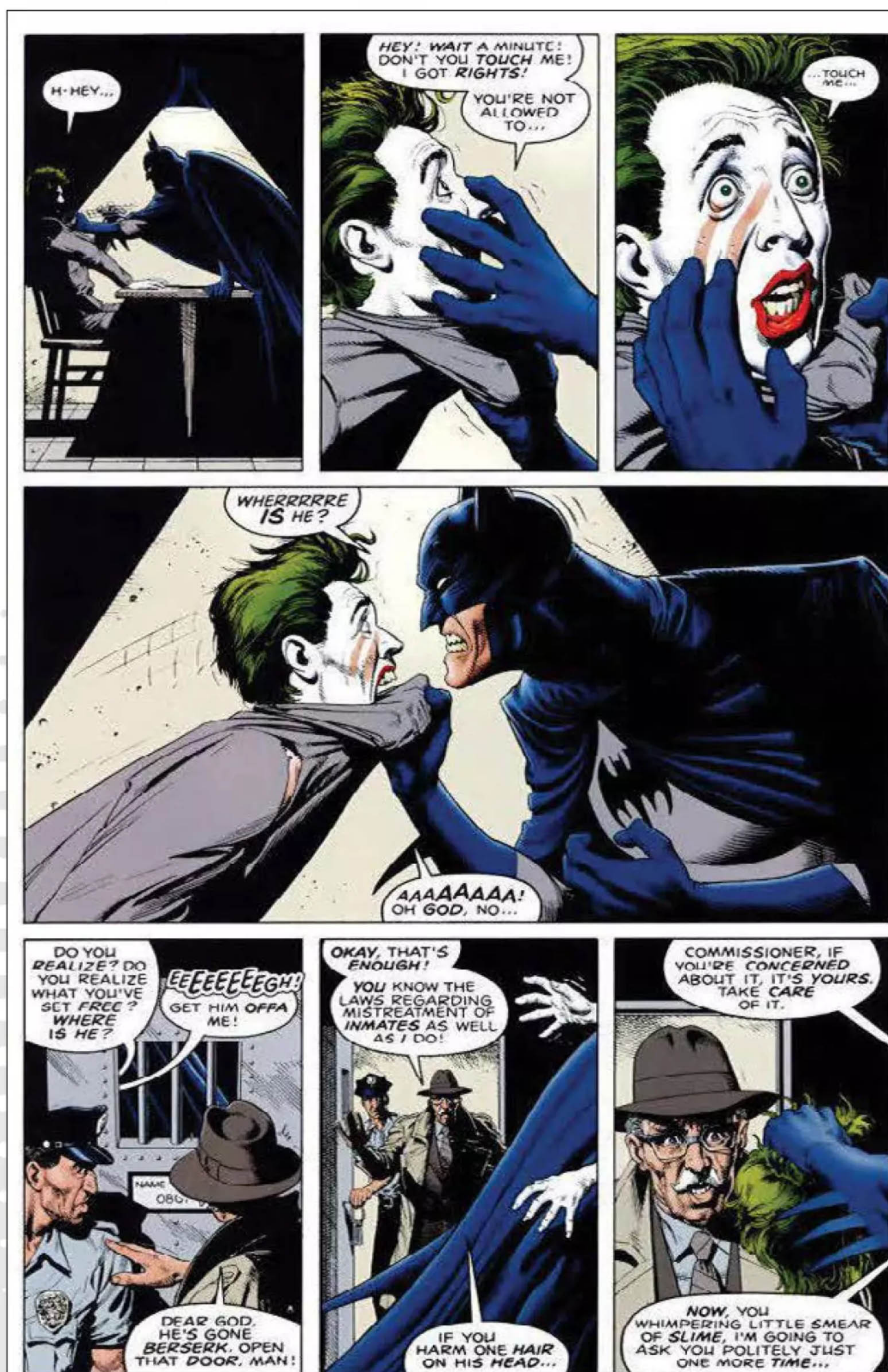
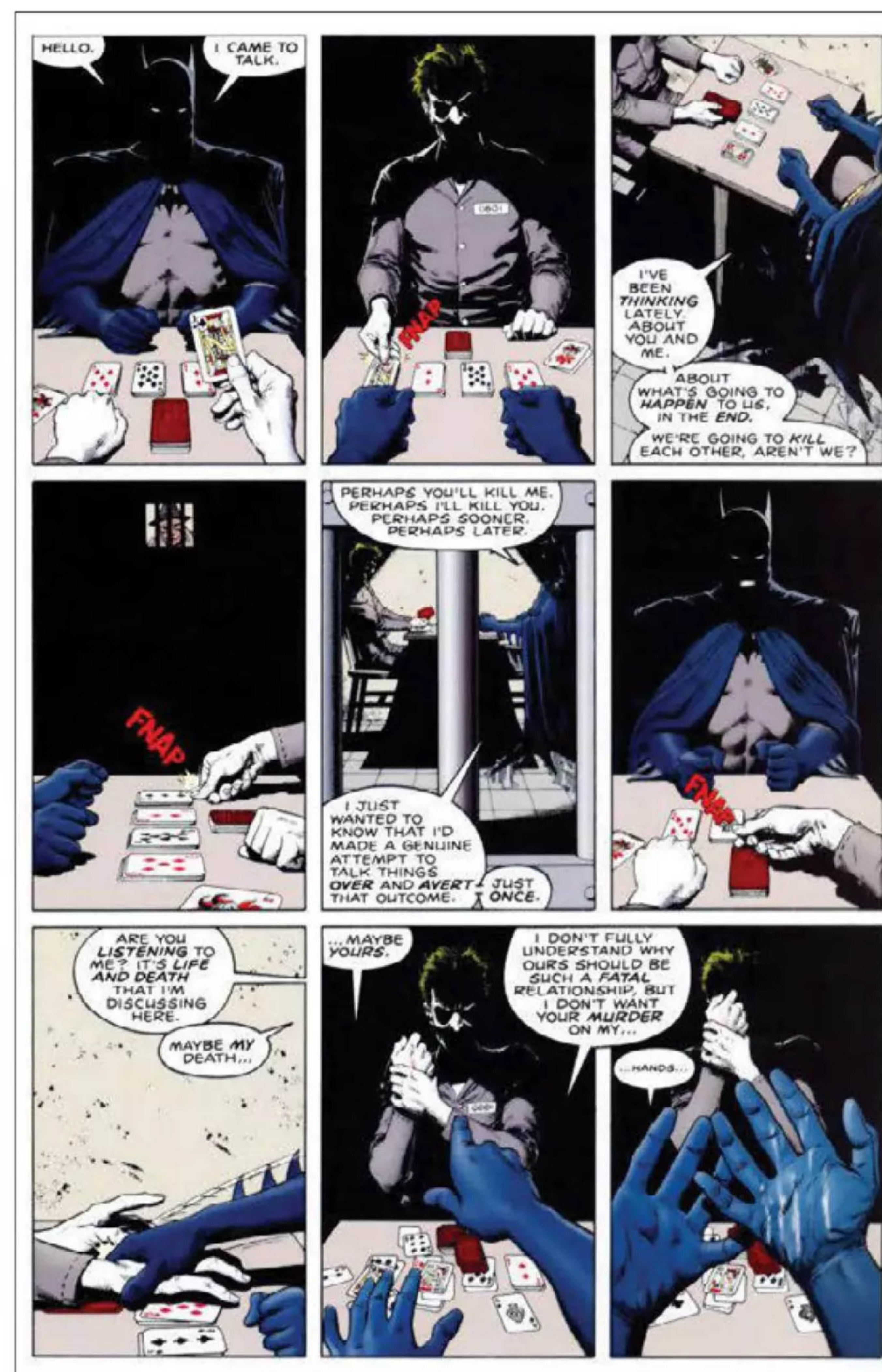
Details Originally published *Batman: The Killing Joke* (1988) **Publisher** DC **Writer** Alan Moore

Artist Brian Bolland **Collected in** *Batman: The Killing Joke* (Special hardcover edition) 2008

Available digitally Comixology, iBookstore

Widely regarded as the greatest Joker story ever told, *Batman: The Killing Joke* is a standalone story that defined Alan Moore as a staple DC writer, and affected the wider Batman canon directly for 15 years after its release. Half Joker origin, half examination of the darker side of human nature, *The Killing Joke* focuses on the Joker's obsession with the idea that anyone can go mad – all it takes is one bad day. To this end, he kidnaps Commissioner Gordon as his experimental subject.

Moore's writing manages to duck in and out of modern day and flashback without pause, almost justifying Joker's torture of Gordon while showing that there *are* weaknesses in the Joker's character – he's just so insane that he's forgotten they're there. Brian Bolland's art never reuses a pose or steps into comic cliché, but rather remains expressive and moody throughout the book, the sketchy linework perfectly complimenting the narrative's obsession with the blurry line between genius and insanity.



GOTHAM CENTRAL: SOFT TARGETS

Details Originally published Gotham Central #12-#15 (2003)

Publisher DC **Writers** Ed Brubaker, Greg Rucka **Artist** Michael Lark

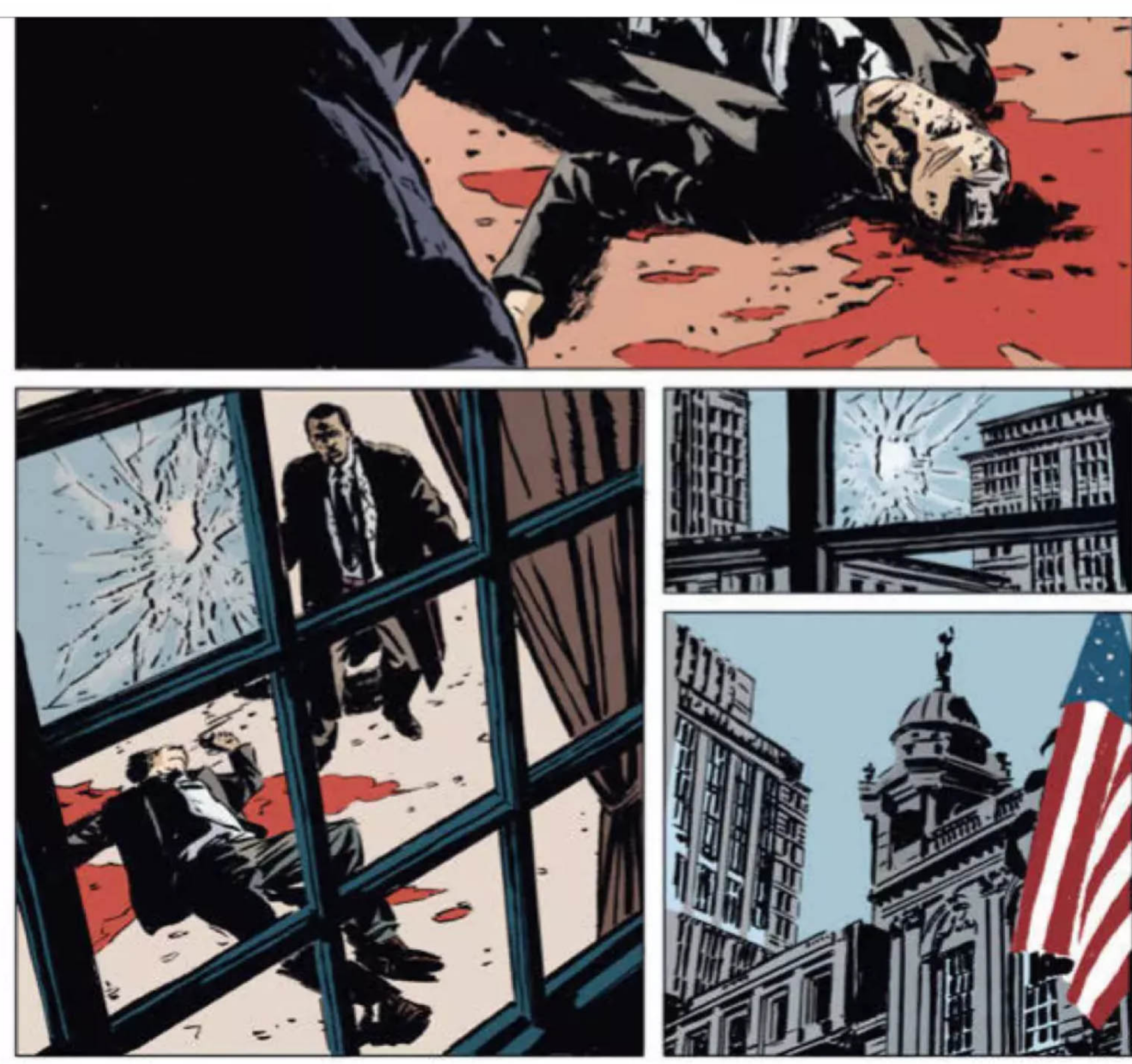
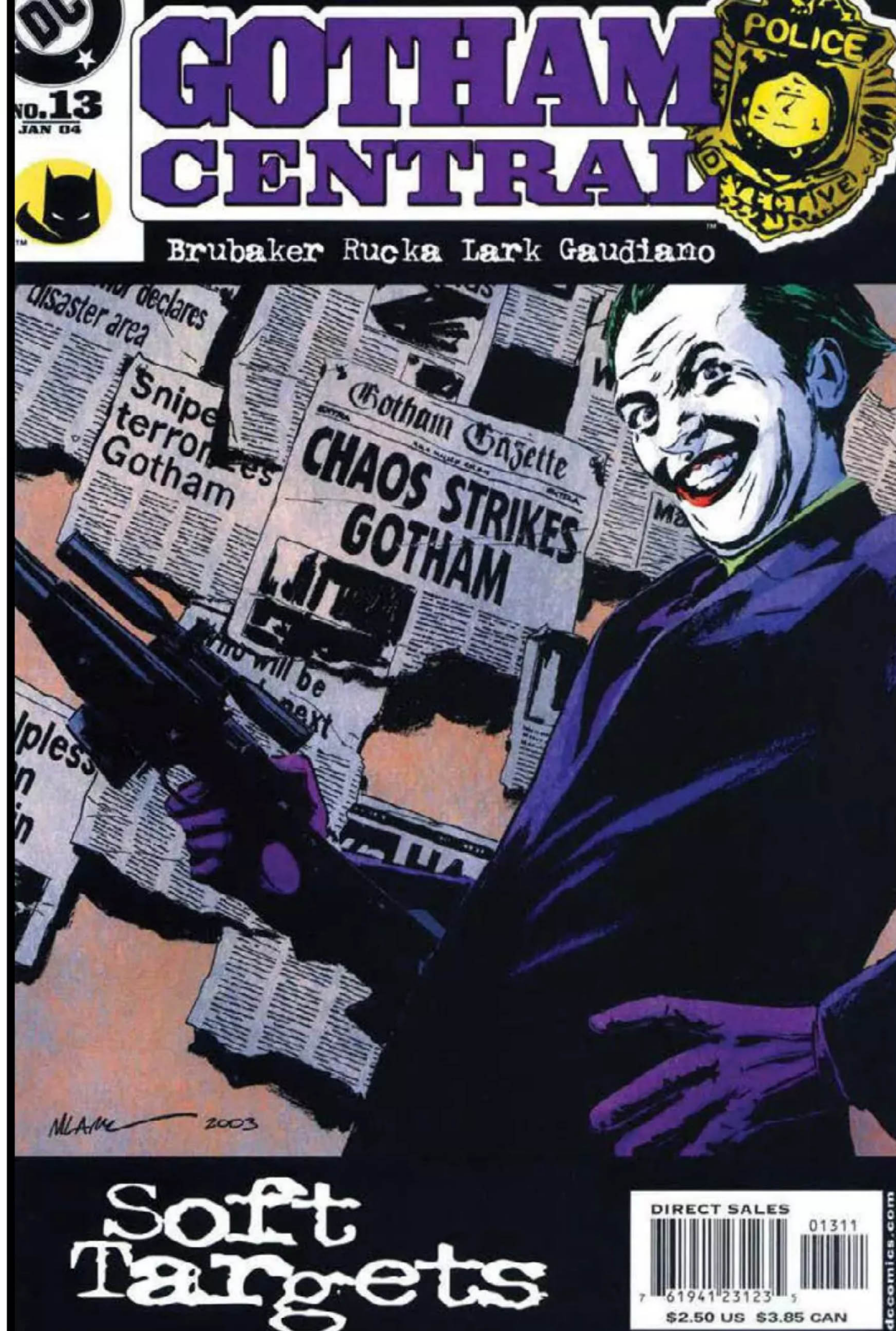
Collected in Gotham Central: Jokers And Madmen **Available digitally**

Comixology, Kindle Fire

While Batman's impossible intellect and physical prowess hold the reader at arms length, *Gotham Central* does the opposite. It turns you into a Gotham citizen and makes you appreciate what it would be like to live in Batman's town, constantly under threat of attack by some crazed supervillain.

We're taken on a ride-along with Gotham Central PD's finest – a remarkably huge ensemble – as they try to police a city that's in the thrall of an illegal vigilante. We go home with the detectives, get to know them, start to understand their in-jokes and complex rivalries. They become far more than just the cops who show up at the end of a Batman story to arrest the bad guy he's already beaten unconscious. They are the story.

Soft Targets takes that set-up, and throws the Joker into the middle of it. Through Batman's eyes the Joker is a nutjob who will inevitably be defeated. But through the eyes of the GCPD, he is the call every police officer dreads. Joker's usually throw-away collateral damage becomes the heart of this story, the jewel in the crown of Brubaker, Rucka and Lark's near-perfect series. He's never been scarier.



Lucifer

Ďábel vchází do dveří

Mike Carey
Scott Hampton
Chris Weston
James Hodgings
Warren Pleece
Dean Ormston

18+

LUCIFER: DEVIL IN THE GATEWAY

Details Originally published The Sandman Presents: Lucifer #1-3;
Lucifer #1-4 (2001-07) **Publisher** Vertigo **Writer** Mike Carey
Artists Various **Collected in** Lucifer: Devil In The Gateway
Available digitally Comixology

Spinning off from Neil Gaiman's *Sandman* universe with all the swagger of a long-established character, Mike Carey's *Lucifer* successfully established itself as an important and hugely entertaining saga in its own right.

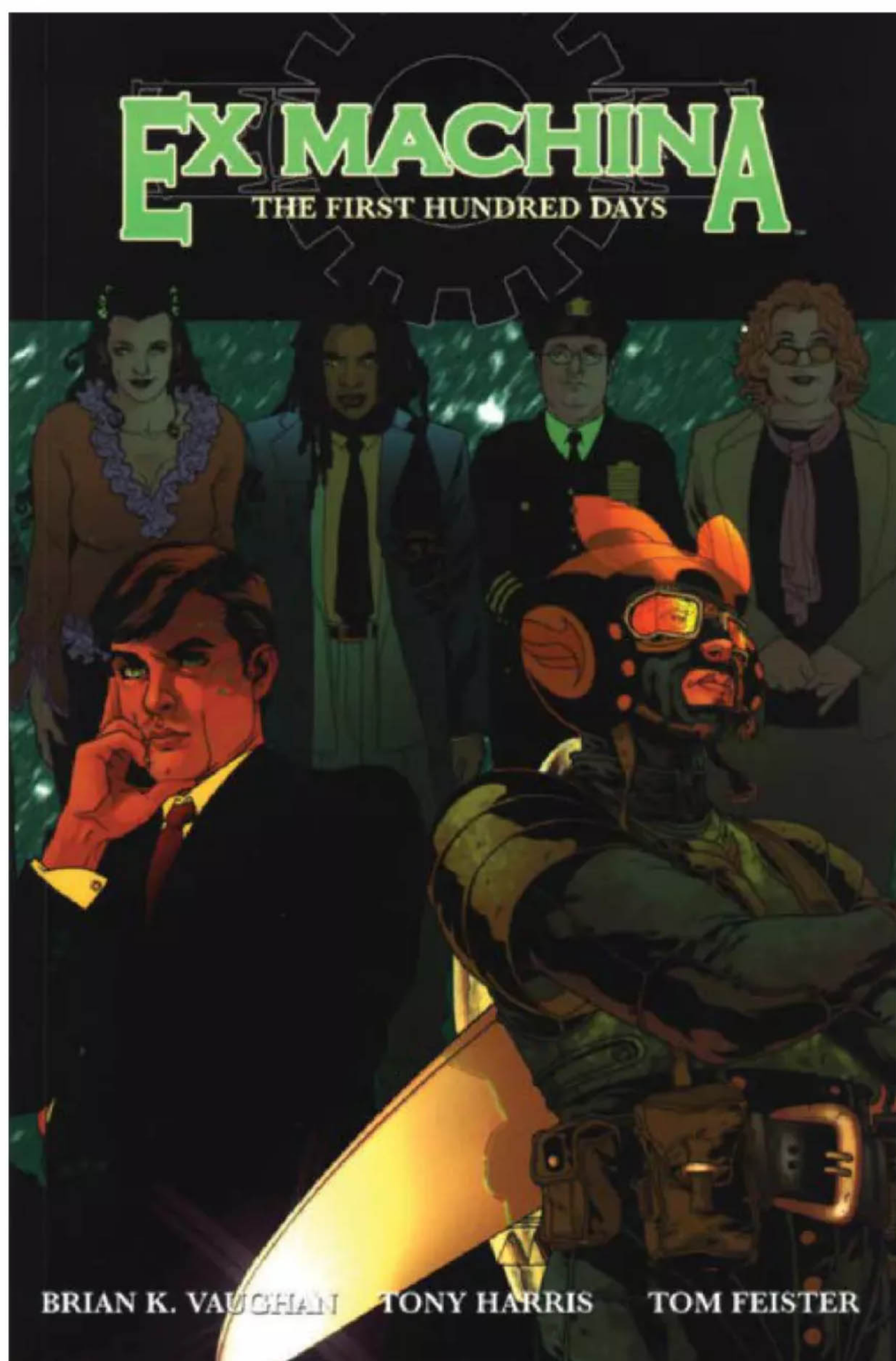
Picking up from where *The Sandman* left him, Lucifer is enjoying his life of retirement running an LA nightspot when he's pulled into a celestial conflict. Naturally, the Lightbringer isn't going to do any favours for the heavenly host, and so begins an interdimensional journey that will tear apart the fabric of existence.

Carey is singing in the key of *Sandman*: using a host of different, brilliant artists to create a far-reaching and brilliantly detailed world full of angels, demons, creatures and spirits.

He also balances the title character's callousness with fantastic original characters like Elaine Belloc and Jill Presto. It doesn't finish as strong as it starts, but it's an engrossing epic journey with a truly unforgettable character at its centre.

The result of which ends up being what is quite possibly the best attempt at keeping the *Sandman* franchise alive.





EX MACHINA: THE FIRST HUNDRED DAYS

Details Originally published Ex Machina #1-5 (2004) **Publisher** Wildstorm **Writer** Brian K Vaughan **Artist** Tony Harris
Collected in Ex Machina: The First Hundred Days **Available digitally** Comixology, Marvel Unlimited

Given the subject matter, you'd be forgiven for thinking that *Ex Machina's* appeal doesn't extend past its shock culture origins. The story revolves around Mitchell Hundred, a man with the ability to communicate and control machines. This strange power turns him into New York's first superhero as he stops the second plane from colliding with the World Trade Centre on 9/11. But it quickly becomes apparent that writer Brian K Vaughan set his sights on something much larger in scope than another superhero story.

Hundred, or The Great Machine as he is later known, runs for mayor of New York, and the book evolves into a sleek political thriller. *The First Hundred Days* is a great introduction to this world, as Vaughan delicately explores what it means for such a powerful and unknown figure to stand in such a position of power. *Ex Machina* might not be *Y: The Last Man* writer Vaughan's most popular series, but it is arguably his finest.



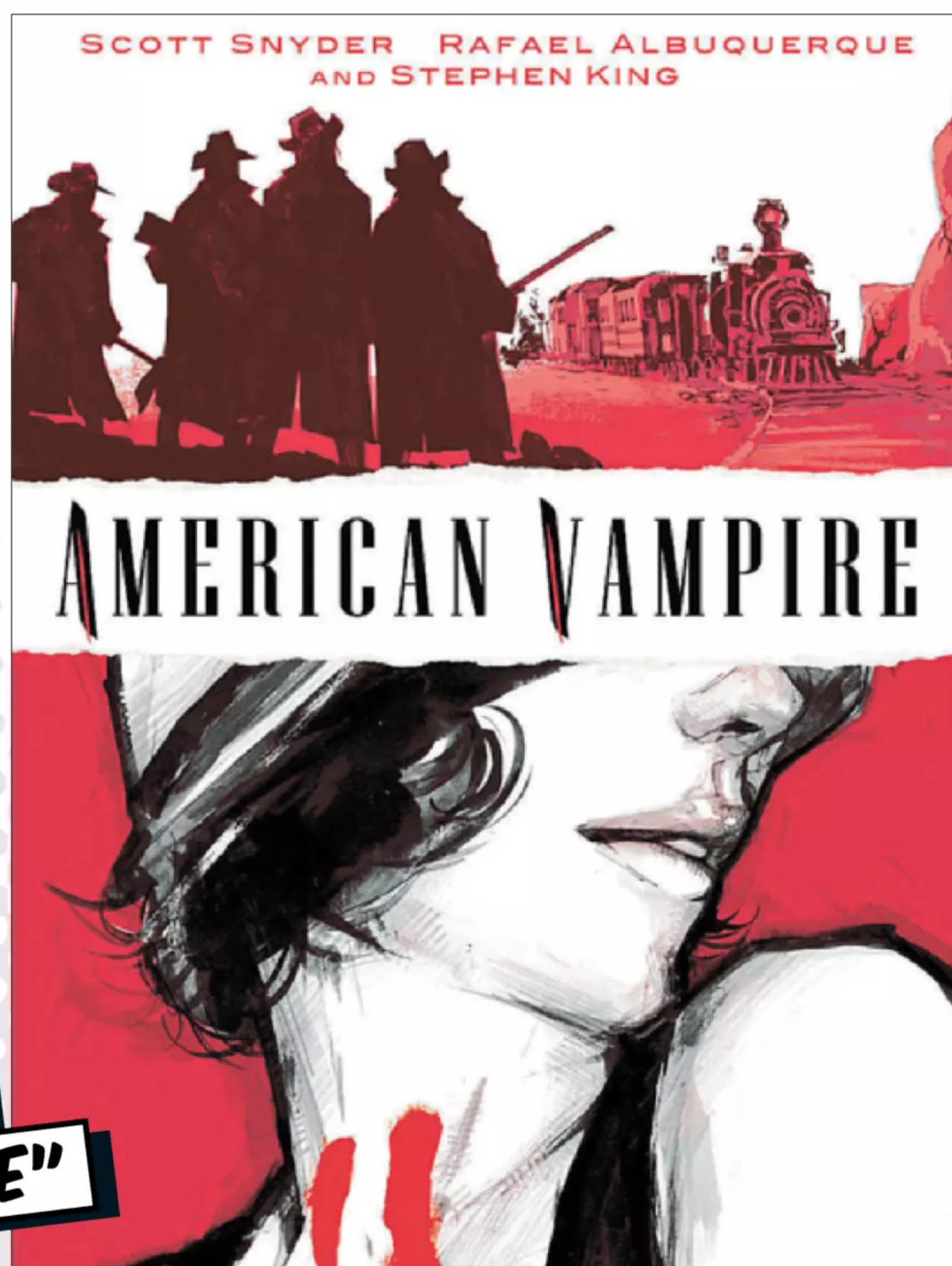
AMERICAN VAMPIRE VOL 1

Details Originally published American Vampire #1-5 (2010) **Publisher** DC Vertigo **Writer** Scott Snyder
Artist Rafael Albuquerque **Collected in** American Vampire: Volume One **Available digitally** Comixology

F Scott Fitzgerald and John Steinbeck by way of Anne Rice and *Near Dark*, Scott Snyder and Rafael Albuquerque's Eisner-Award winning *American Vampire* is the first big Vertigo epic of the 21st Century and has Stephen King's input to prove it, with the master of Maine writing a whole issue – his comic-book debut with another creator's toys.

Spanning the American Century and weaving vampire mythology and American folklore into a blood-soaked tapestry that links the Wild West of undead outlaw Skinner Sweet with the exploitative Jazz Age Los Angeles of would-be starlet Pearl Jones, newly fanged-up and stubbornly straddling the world of the living and dead as she tries to carve out an unlife of her own.

Frantically paced, viciously playful and with visceral, urgent art from Albuquerque, there's nothing sparkly about *American Vampire*.



**"THERE IS NOTHING
 SPARKLY ABOUT
 AMERICAN VAMPIRE"**

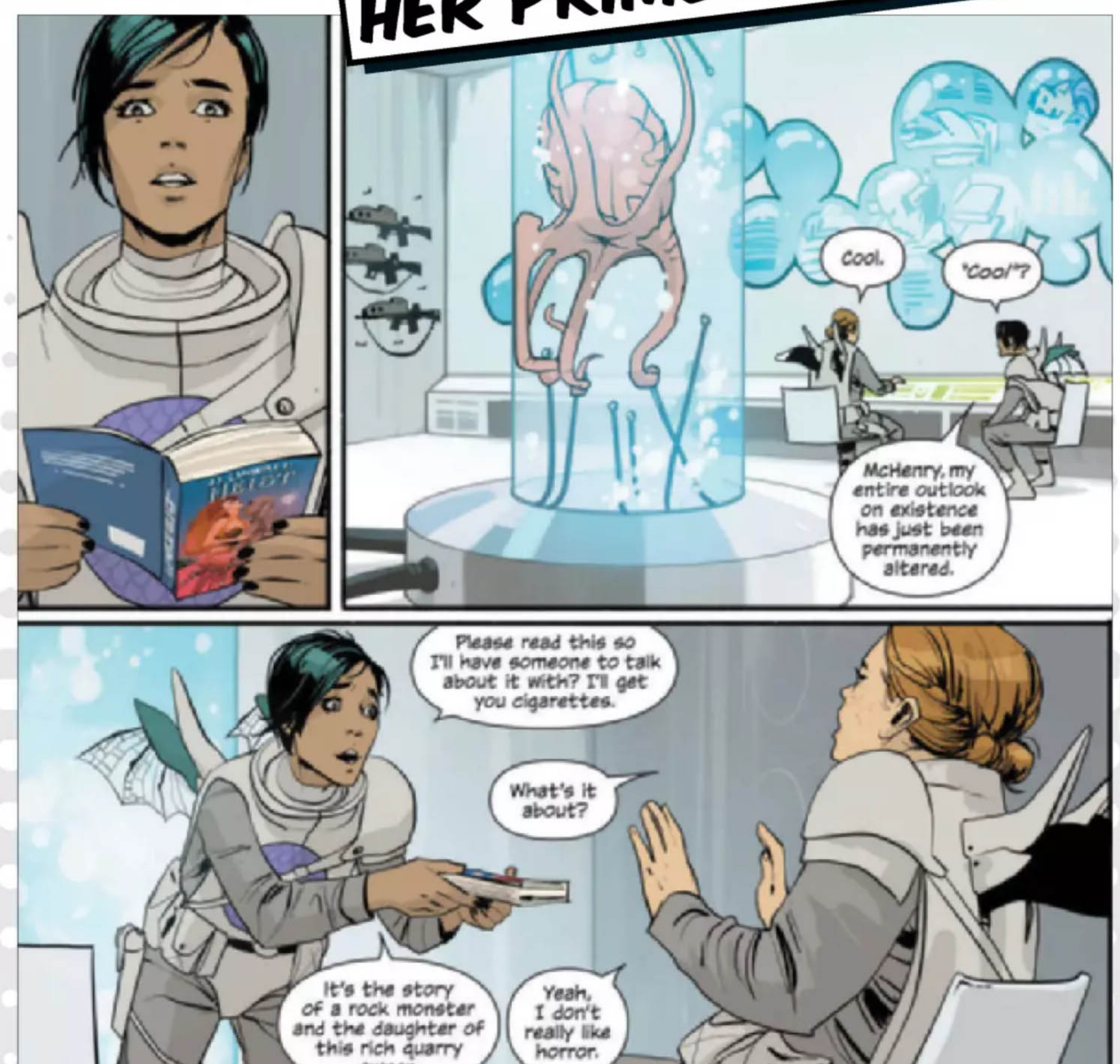
SAGA: VOL 1

Details Originally published Saga #1-6 (2012) **Publisher** Image
Writer Brian K. Vaughan **Artist** Fiona Staples **Collected in** Saga: Vol 1
Available digitally Comixology, iBookstore

Saga is more than just a name; it's a statement of intent. Vaughan's ability to weave in and out of myriad genres is spellbinding, and the resulting fantasy world it creates is immediately reminiscent of sci-fi and fantasy epics throughout literary history. The entire tale unfolds with the birth of protagonist duo Marko and Alana's first child, Hazel, whose retrospective storytelling provides a unique and well-used scaffolding in which Vaughan spins his story.

Fiona Staples is at her prime in *Saga*, too; her delicate linework framing a bold and broad colour palette that brings out the nuances of the diverse universe that *Saga* calls home. Her wide, horizontal cosmic vistas establish out-world settings in a flash, and her mastery at expressing her characters' emotions isn't to be underestimated either. She probably draws some of the most emotive faces we've seen in comics in the past decade.

"FIONA STAPLES IS AT HER PRIME IN SAGA"



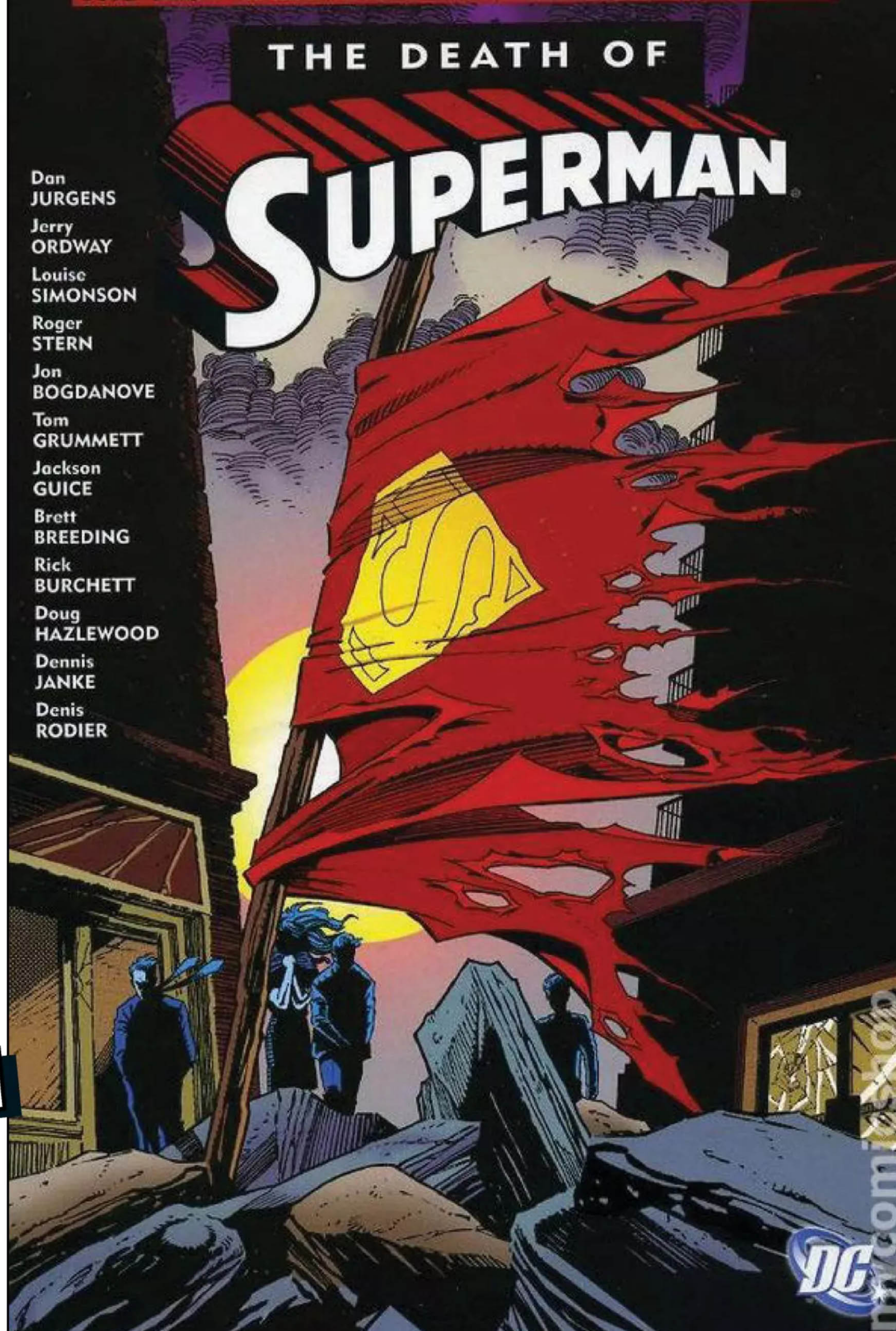
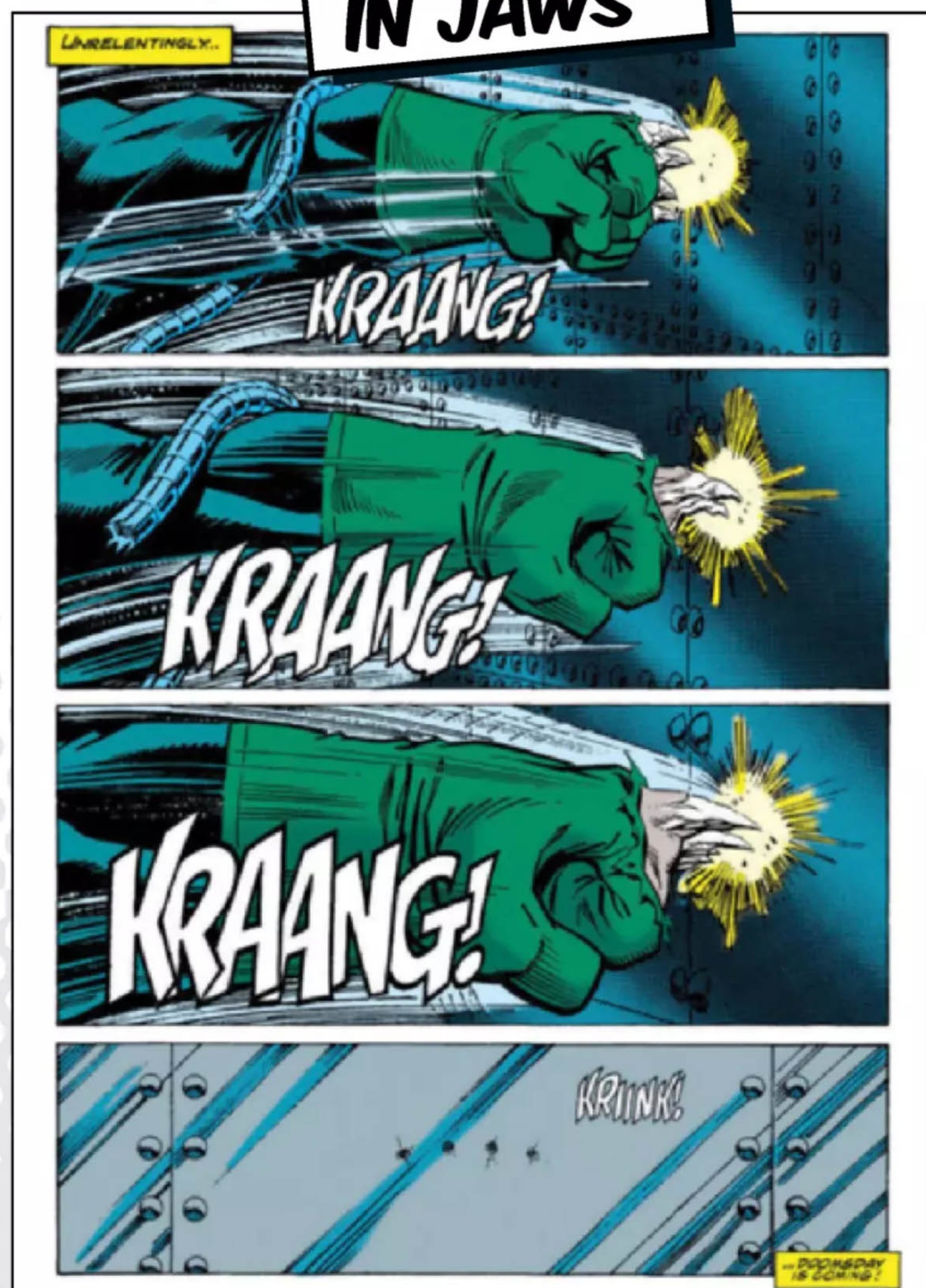
THE DEATH OF SUPERMAN

Details Originally published Numerous (1992) **Publisher** DC **Writers** Various **Artists** Various **Collected in** The Death Of Superman (1993) **Available digitally** Kindle, Comixology

The Death of Superman has stood the test of time pretty well. That's because Doomsday is treated like the shark in *Jaws*, a threat that gets closer with every issue. His demolition of the Justice League is genuinely unsettling even now, and there's some real edge-of-the-seat moments in the holding actions fought to delay him.

Then you get to the fight itself, and the entire book takes off. It's hugely emotional and overwrought, and every excess of the era is there on the splash pages: portentous narration and huge violence. But you don't care, because there's a real air of desperation to the final few pages and genuine emotional impact to the actual death, even with everything that followed it. A retro classic, but a classic nonetheless.

"DOOMSDAY IS TREATED LIKE THE SHARK IN JAWS"



DAREDEVIL THE MAN WITHOUT FEAR

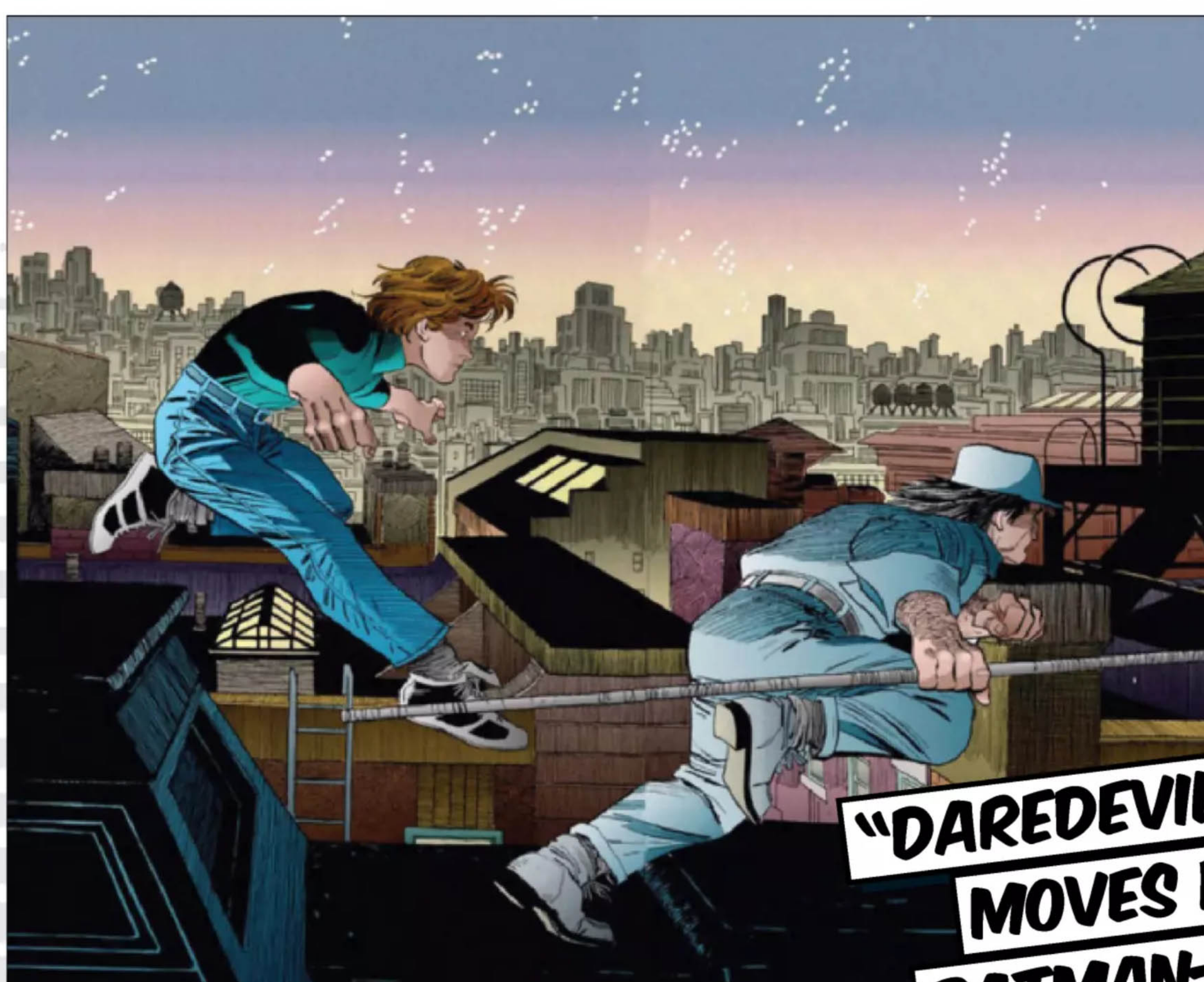
Frank Miller
John Romita Jr.

DAREDEVIL: THE MAN WITHOUT FEAR

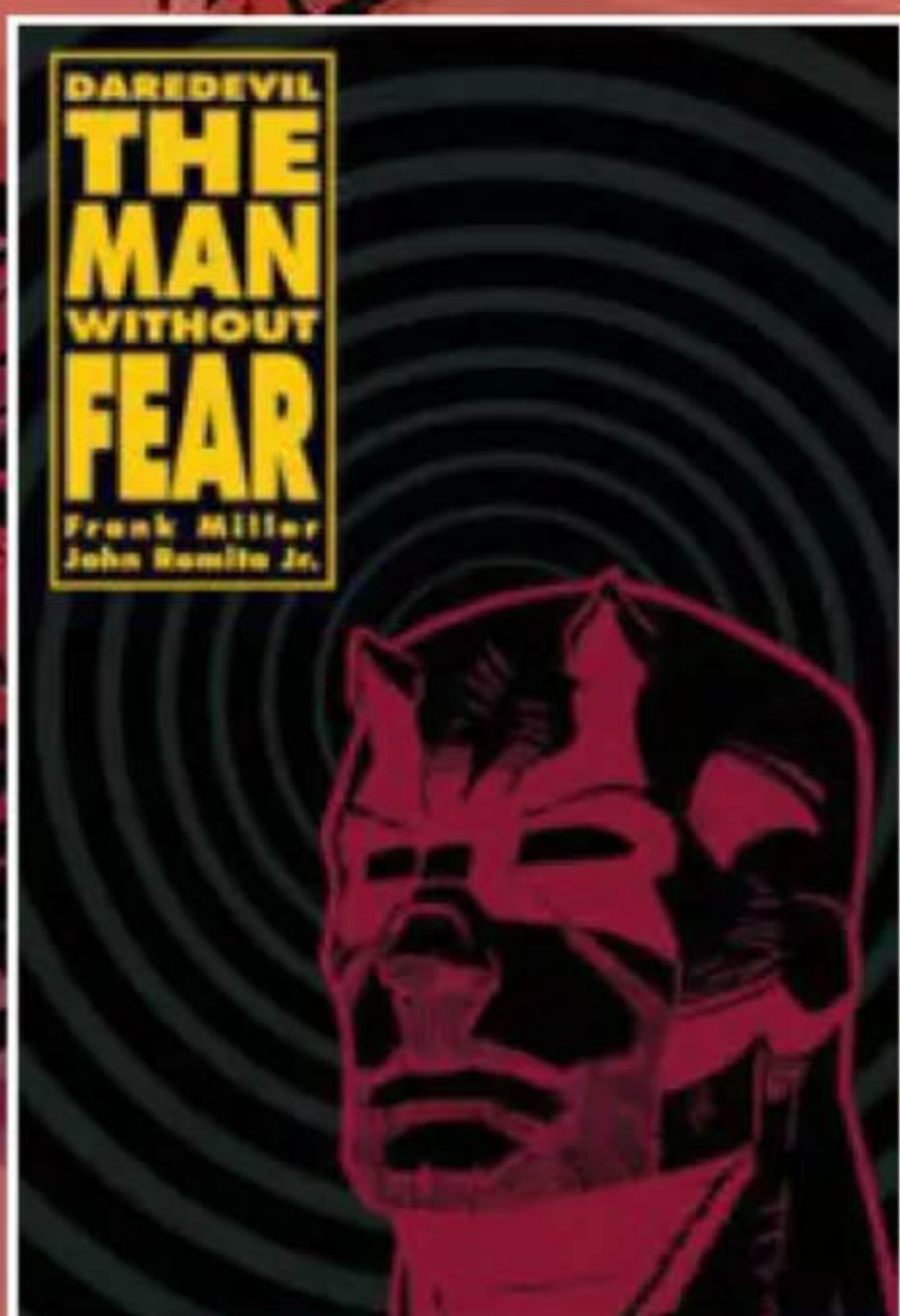
Details Originally published Daredevil: The Man Without Fear #1-5 (1993/4)
Publisher Marvel **Writer** Frank Miller **Artist** John Romita Jr **Collected in** Daredevil: The Man Without Fear (£12.83) **Available digitally** Comixology, Marvel Unlimited

A huge influence on Marvel's recent Netflix series, Frank Miller and John Romita Jr's *The Man Without Fear* mini is perhaps one of the greatest mainstream superhero comics of the Nineties.

In a similar vein to *Batman: Year One*'s soft retcon, Miller strips back the Matt Murdock origin story to its basic arc before layering on the themes and motifs most relevant to his own take (Catholic guilt, urban blight, Ninjas, er, prostitutes) on the character – retrofitting a start point to his own definition of the Guardian of Hell's Kitchen. Where this stops being Miller's show (not necessarily a bad thing, not yet) is in the idiosyncratic stone age line-work of Romita Jr, one of the definitive Marvel artists of the Nineties and Noughties. With Romita Jr, Daredevil's world moves from *Batman-in-Red* and into a blue-collar weariness all of its own, one that still lingers on the character today.



"DAREDEVIL'S WORLD
MOVES FROM
BATMAN-IN-RED"



The best of John Romita Jr

**Daredevil: The Man
Without Fear (1993)**

This five-issue miniseries written by Frank Miller retells Daredevil's origin, and is reported to have influenced the new Netflix TV show.

SUPERMAN REDRAWN

Legendary comic artist John Romita Jr reflects on his first year drawing Superman, talks new powers and costumes, and looks ahead to his visit to the London Super Comic Con

If you follow his adventures in the comics, you'll know that Superman has had an eventful few months.

One of the big talking points recently was *Superman* #38, on sale last month, which saw him unleash a new power that he did not realise he had on unsuspecting antagonist Ulysses. This reveal was followed by him donning a new costume – a tweaked version of the New 52 threads – and a major change in his relationship with pal Jimmy Olsen.

The issue was the final part of a story by superstar DC writer Geoff Johns and artist John Romita Jr, best known for his extensive work at Marvel, dating back to the Seventies. It could be said that Marvel was in his blood, with his father, John Romita Sr, the first artist to take over from Steve Ditko on *The Amazing Spider-Man* under Stan Lee. In later years, Romita Jr (who refers to himself as JRJR) forged his own relationship with the character, perhaps most famously in the December 2001 issue, where Spider-Man deals with the fallout of the September 11 attacks.

But Romita Jr has drawn just about every Marvel character there is, including the *Kick-Ass* series with writer Mark Millar. As the recent events in *Superman* prove, sometimes you need to shake things up, and when an opportunity to move to DC came along, working with Geoff Johns and inker Klaus Janson on such an iconic hero, it seemed like a change that was needed. It looks like it paid off too, as Romita Jr will no doubt reveal when he visits the UK for the London Super Comic Con this month.

You've been drawing Superman for almost a year now. How have you found it?

The whole process has been a lot of fun, and the editors and Geoff Johns have been a great pleasure to work with. What I had been concerned with, regarding the change in characters and the two companies, I thought it would be much more tumultuous, it wasn't... it was basically just a change in the type of costume I was drawing, and wasn't as big a move as I expected. I still got to do the same thing I'd been doing for the last 35 years.

It must have been strange switching companies after that time...

How it happened, I was interested in doing

creator-owned properties at Marvel, similar to *Kick-Ass*, as I didn't want to just stick with the mainstream work. So I talked to them about it, but then my contract expired and we were having discussions back and forth. DC got in touch, and my wife, Kathy, had always been interested in me working there because she wanted to see the difference, and even my father signed off on it. He said, "Hey, don't just carry on working for Marvel, do what is best for you." A lot of other people were supportive, and while I wanted something new, I hadn't really planned on changing companies; it just happened. But I'm very happy, and I'm thrilled to be doing *Superman*.

How did it feel to draw the character first of all? He's been around for over 75 years...

I actually had a little bit of an anxiety attack the first time I did it, saying to myself, "I am drawing the oldest and most revered superhero in comics – there are so many guys who have done this before me. What am I going to do?" But literally the moment I first drew the cape, I thought, "Wait a minute, I've drawn a character with a cape

before, this is kind of cool." So I felt a lot more comfortable. And the way you handle the character is not dissimilar to the way you might handle Thor, in terms of his power. Then it was just a matter of getting the jawline and the hair right.

You've drawn DC characters before, though – at Marvel you drew the cover for a DC/Marvel Crossover Classics trade paperback, and there was the *Batman Vs Punisher* special...

That's correct, and that's why I always imagined I would do Batman again at some point, but instead I'm doing Superman, the very character that I didn't care for several years ago because I thought he was just too perfect. But I found the ideas that Geoff [Johns] had were amazing.

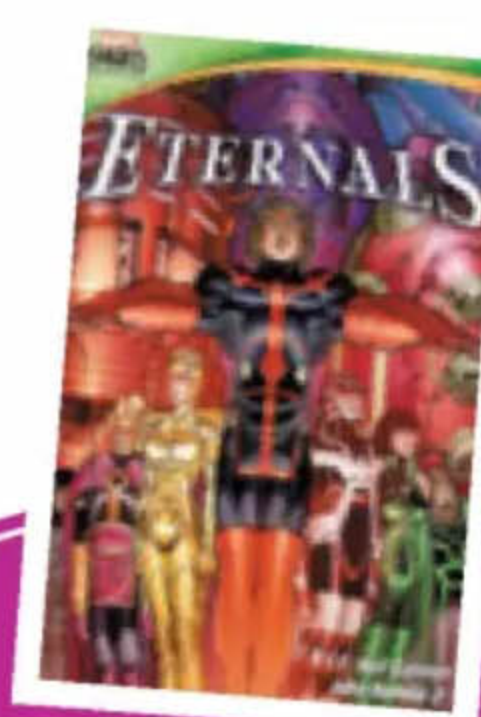
They all seemed to come to fruition in *Superman* #38 with the new 'Super Flare' power and the costume changes. Were you part of all that?

The editors of the *Superman* books had been talking about it for a while and asking, "Couldn't we do something with Superman's powers, maybe show another side to them, something that manifests? It's not something we've shaken up in a while." So myself, Greg Pak, Gene Luen Yang, Aaron Kuder and Pete Tomasi threw a few ideas around, and along with Geoff [Johns] came up with an extension of his regular abilities [the flare is a powerful blast caused by Superman expelling all of the solar energy from his cells at once, discovered by accident]. The fact that it happened in the first story arc I worked on was pure luck on my side, but it'll play into all of the other books. His costume got destroyed by that, so he makes a new one with a few tweaks. The changes are pretty minimal, as it's so iconic there isn't a lot you can do. We just wanted to freshen it a little, and we did it at a point when the old one was damaged, so it makes sense.

This is a power that also weakens Superman after he uses it – no more solar energy means he is basically mortal for 24 hours until he recharges...

That's right. And it's Batman who tells him this when he wakes up in the Batcave, which means I got to do a brief but vital

“THE CHANGES ARE PRETTY MINIMAL, AS IT'S SO ICONIC THERE ISN'T A LOT YOU CAN DO”
JOHN ROMITA JR



The best of John Romita Jr
The Eternals (2006)

Romita Jr helped writer Neil Gaiman with this seven-issue mini-series that reintroduced Jack Kirby's Seventies characters to the modern Marvel universe.

➤ appearance of a character I really wanted to draw again. That was very exciting, but it can be daunting to draw all of the Batcave.

You'll have other DC characters to draw soon, as Superman will be testing his new power against the Justice League in an issue you're writing. Is that correct?

He will be trying it out against the Justice League, yes. I know the basic idea for that issue, but not specifically which characters will be in it. At this stage, it's an idea we are still developing. That's #40, and I'm just finishing up #39 right now. But those two issues are the bridge to our next big story arc, and there will be repercussions from the changes we've introduced. A big change is coming up with Clark Kent/Superman, but I can't tell you about that yet. I'm plotting #40, I know that, and as far as doing the dialogue goes I'll see how the time works out.

That's the other recent announcement, of course, that Geoff Johns is leaving the book, to be replaced by Gene Luen Yang. What will he bring to the character?

I can't tell you, I have to keep my mouth shut [laughs]. All I will say is that the storyline covering all of the Superman books is in great hands. I just sit back and draw whatever they give me.

Are you upset about Geoff leaving? He has so many film and TV commitments, it must be hard for him to write comics...

These guys taking off for Hollywood, how can he choose [laughs]? I think he is still writing *Justice League*, though.

Working with him, did he ever tell you about what he had coming up? Did he show you the script for *Batman v Superman: Dawn Of Justice*, for example?

He didn't, but I'm really looking forward to that. I think Ben Affleck is a hell of an actor, I think he'll pull it off. And honestly, people

IT'S A GENRE THAT HAS LONGEVITY, AND IF YOU HAVE IDEAS... YOU CAN MAKE IT HAPPEN

JOHN ROMITA JR



The artist is excited at what's ahead for the likes of Spider-Man.

are asking me now, "How can it be Batman against Superman? Superman is going to tear his head off!" And I say, "You've got to watch it."

You must be excited about the Marvel/Sony deal too, allowing Spider-Man to star in some of the Marvel movies, considering your history with the character...

Yes, they are connecting Spider-Man to the rest of the Marvel universe onscreen, and I think that's great, I'm very happy for them. The fans have been waiting for that for a long time. Every superhero and comic-book has the ability to work well as a movie, and when it does then that's good for all of us. It's a genre that has longevity, and if you have ideas, the creative talent and the stories, you can make it happen as live action. It's something here for the long haul.

Wasn't Spider-Man your introduction to comics? When your father was drawing it, didn't you design a character, the Prowler, for him?

I came up with the name, but the costume I designed was so awful. Even Stan Lee in his pleasantness said [adopts Stan voice], "Hate the costume, love the name." So they kept the name, and he looked nothing like the version I did, but they did give me credit for it when I was 13.

One of your great *Spider-Man* stories was the 9/11 issue, addressing how the character felt about that happening in his city. Is one that still resonates with you?

Yeah, it does. I have a hard time... honestly, I haven't even opened up that issue since about 2002. I can't look at it. I have the original artwork in my safe here and I don't know what I'm going to do with it. Maybe one day I'll donate it, perhaps to a 9/11 charity. But I don't know what to do with the artwork. I'm holding onto it, I've been offered amazing amounts of money for it, I can't conceive of selling it for a profit unless it's for an emergency, I don't know, I honestly don't know. But I can't look at it... it breaks me up.



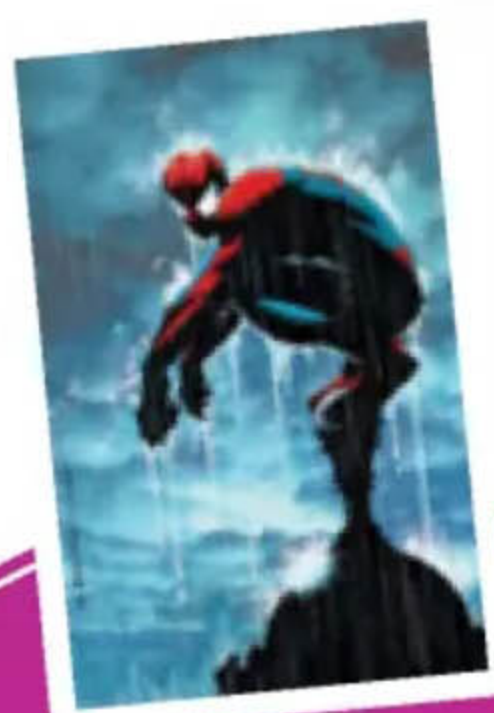
The best of John Romita Jr

Kick-Ass (2008)

Before the original movie, Kick-Ass was just a miniseries with Romita Jr's art and Mark Millar's writing. Spawned two sequels and a *Hit-Girl* prequel.



He has also presided over some interesting new changes to Superman.



The best of John Romita Jr

The Amazing Spider-Man Vol 2 30-58 (2001-03)

Romita Jr first drew Spider-Man in the Eighties, but teaming him up with *Babylon 5* creator J Michael Straczynski years later breathed new life into him.

Romita Jr has gained an even wider audience via his work on *Kick-Ass*.

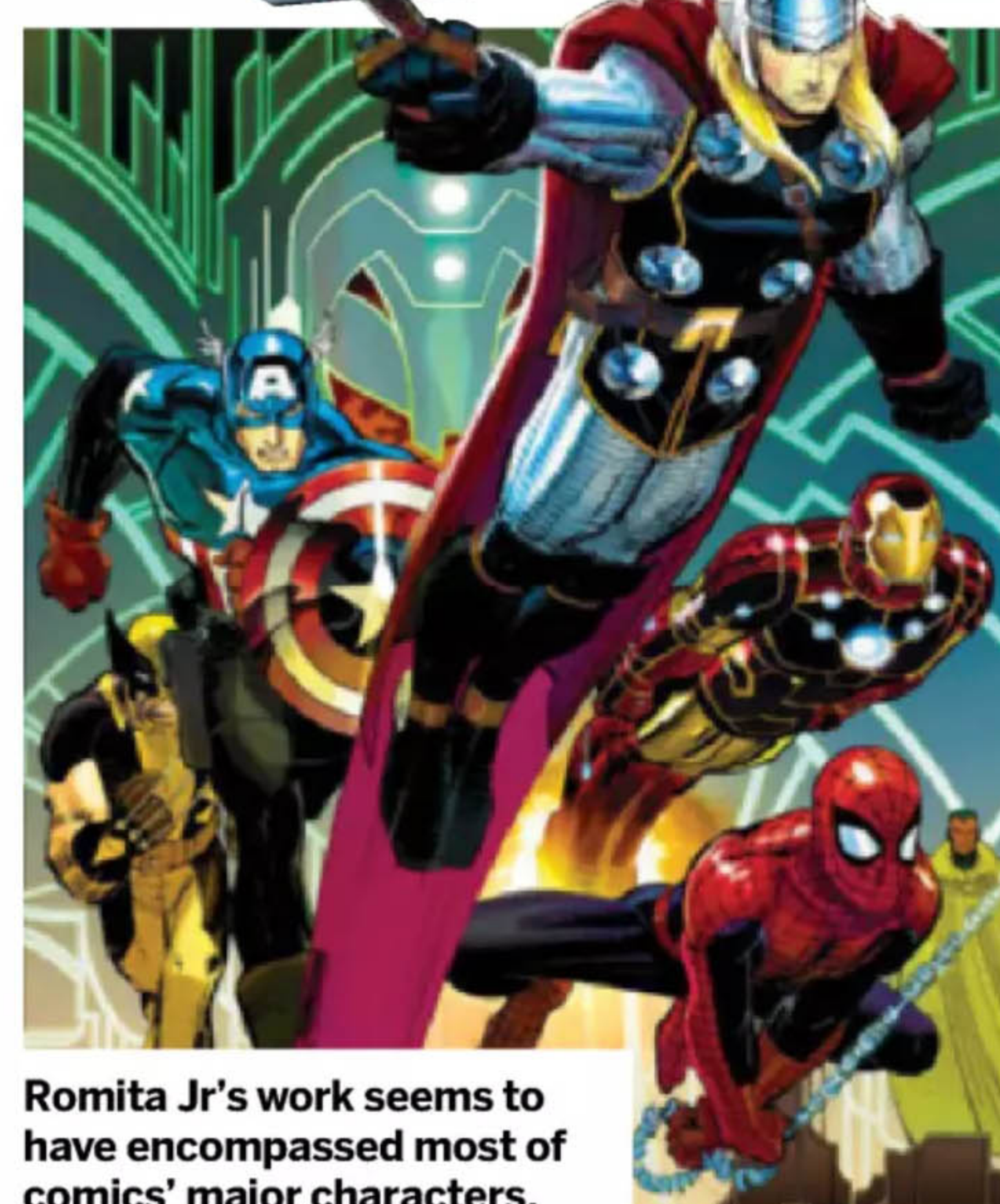
But you're coming to the UK in March for the London Super Comic Con...

I am. I'm really looking forward to it. London is my favourite city in the world after New York, and I'll be walking around, seeing some friends after the convention...

And at DC, is the plan to stick with Superman, or will there be other projects?

I don't know. I know what I want to do, but what they allow me to do or embrace, we'll see what happens. There are a certain amount of issues that I intended to do on *Superman*, and I have about another year of those. I have couple of ideas I'd like to try, but I'd also like to stick with a regular monthly. Whatever keeps the guy writing the cheques happy [laughs].

John Romita Jr will be appearing at the London Super Comic Con from March 14-15 at the Excel Centre, London. For ticket info, see www.londonsupercomicconvention.com. *Superman* is published monthly by DC Comics – visit www.dccomics.com for more information.



Romita Jr's work seems to have encompassed most of comics' major characters.



CIVIL WARTM

MARK MILLAR

STEVE MCNIVEN

DEXTER VINES

MORRY HOLLOWELL

A MARVEL COMICS® EVENT IN SEVEN PARTS

1

"THIS ISN'T A
TYPICAL SUPER-POWERED
SLUGFEST"

CIVIL WAR

Details Originally published Civil War #1-7 (2007) **Publisher** Marvel **Writer** Mark Millar
Artist Steve McNiven **Collected in** Civil War **Available digitally** Comixology, Marvel Unlimited

Civil War is the most important event in contemporary Marvel history. It saw the costumed heroes of the Marvel universe divided over the introduction of Superhuman Registration Act – a bill that would see all masked vigilantes forced to declare their identities to the public. It asks you to choose a side: are you with Iron Man, representing a push for total transparency, or Captain America, who's supporting those who feel they have a right to wear a mask in service of the people?

As you might imagine, *Civil War* quickly elevates to a fever pitch. Friends clash, enemies make alliances and lives are shattered; and when the dust settles, the Marvel universe changes forever. This isn't a typical super-powered slugfest; it's a compelling story of political intrigue that forces you to question moral responsibility in a foreign but familiar land. If you're after big scenes of action featuring your favourite Marvel characters, you won't be disappointed with *Civil War*.



TANK GIRL: VOL 1

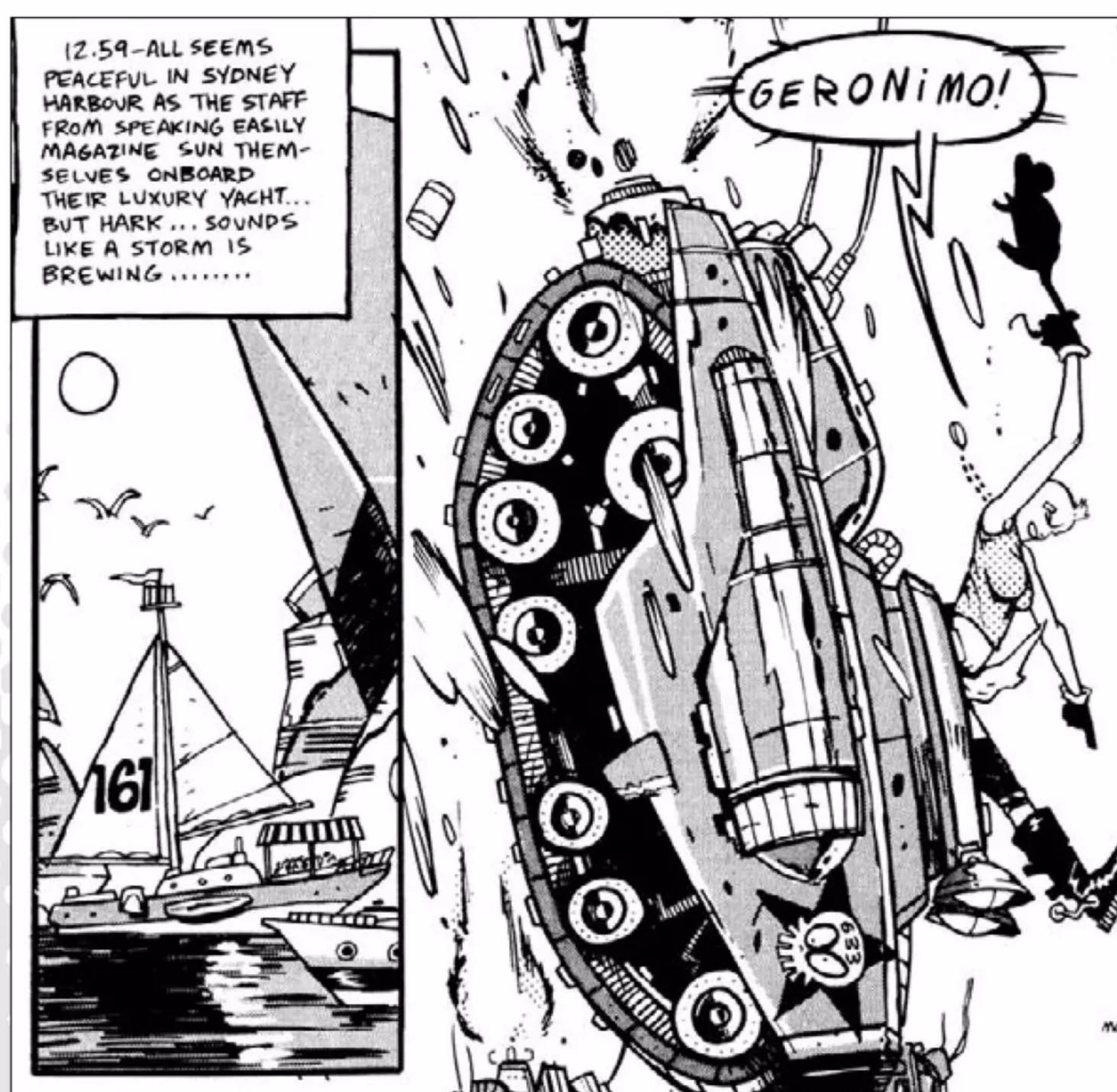
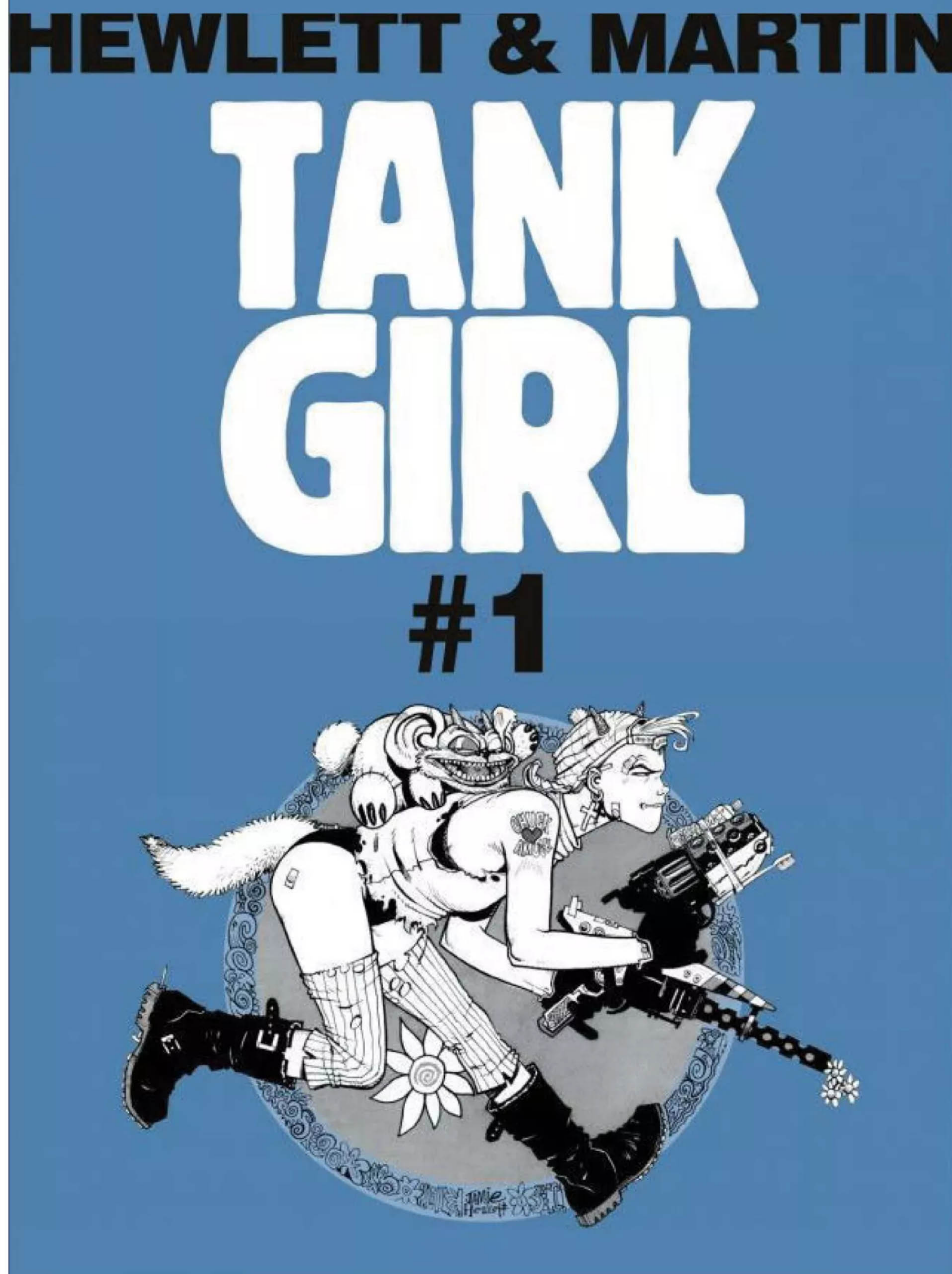
Details Originally published Deadline #1-13 (1988-89); Tank Girl #1-4 (1991) **Publisher** Deadline Publications **Writers** Alan C Martin, Jamie Hewlett **Artist** Jamie Hewlett **Collected in** Tank Girl One (Remastered Edition) **Available digitally** Comixology

A British punk comic that began in the late Eighties and continued through the height of the riot grrrl movement, non-comic readers probably recognise the early work of Gorillaz artist Jamie Hewlett.

Set in post-apocalyptic Australia, Tank Girl – who does indeed drive a tank – undertakes various missions with her boyfriend Booga, a mutant kangaroo, by her side.

The anarchist strip was heavily influenced by punk art, and incorporated the absurd, the psychedelic, and the surreal alongside various techniques from zines. Stream of consciousness, cut-up, and collage all take precedence over any kind of conventional plot. It's madness, basically; glorious madness.

Tank Girl hit the big-time in the early Nineties as the indie counterculture further embraced politicisation against Thatcher and for the rise of punk-ass feminism. *Tank Girl* remains one of the most potent symbols of the riot grrrl movement, and is seriously overdue a decent film adaptation.





ISSUE #1
\$3.99

LOCKE & KEY

JOE HILL

Greatest Comics

LOCKE & KEY: WELCOME TO LOVECRAFT

Details Originally published *Locke & Key* #1-6 (2008) **Publisher** IDW

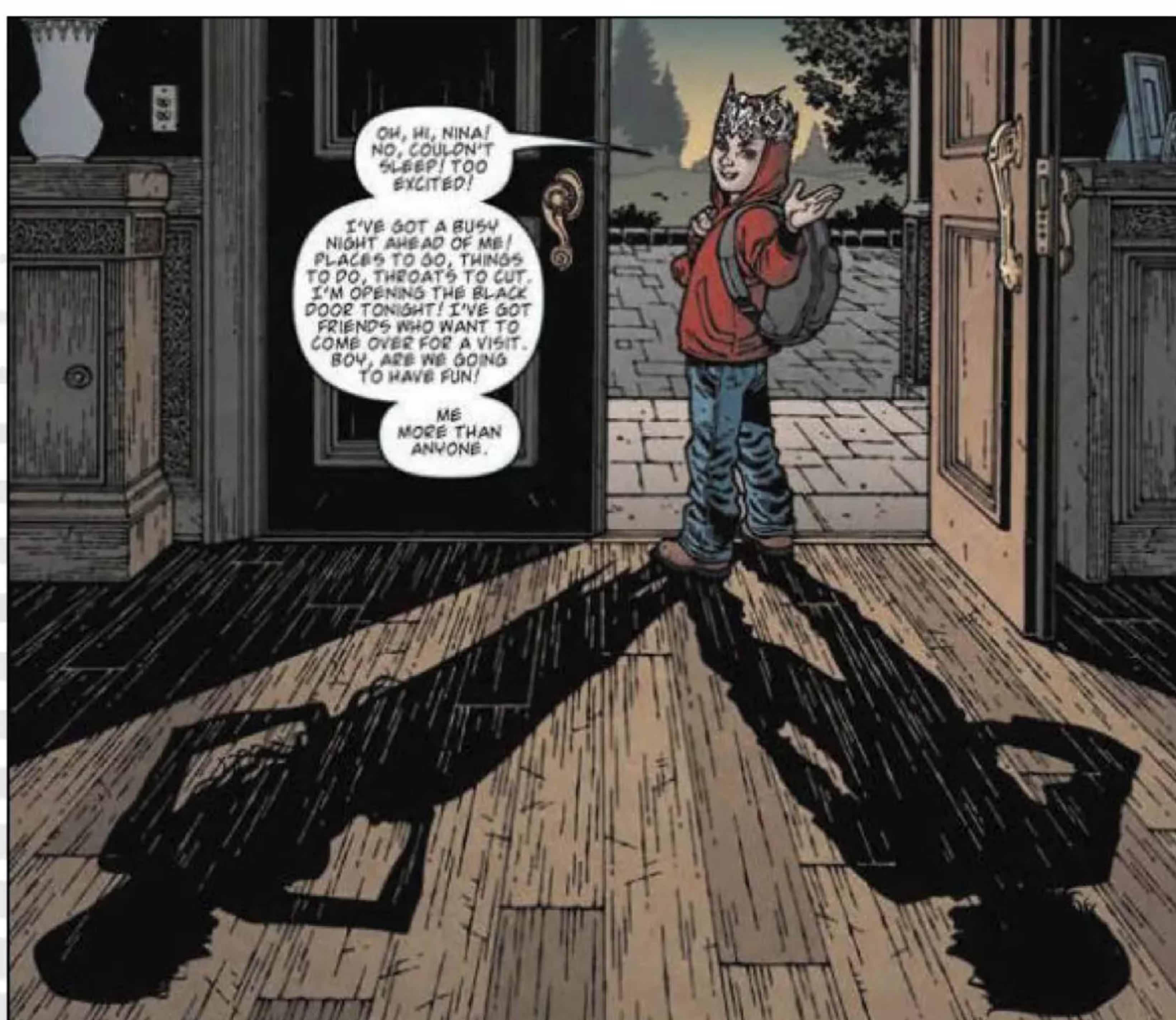
Writer Joe Hill **Artist** Gabriel Rodriguez **Collected in** *Locke & Key*:

Welcome To Lovecraft **Available digitally** Comixology

Joe Hill was already well on his way to being established as an important writer in his own right before *Locke & Key* debuted, but this dark, twisted and endlessly inventive series confirmed him as one of genre's most exciting talents.

Following the murder of their father, the Locke family move in with their uncle in the imposing Keyhouse in Lovecraft, Mass. As they struggle to carry on with their lives, a supernatural entity worms its way into their lives and begins its search for the keys that unlock unimaginable evil.

As you'd expect, given the town's name and the title of the first collection, the influence of the Cthulhu creator looms large, but there's far more to *Locke & Key* than that single figure. Hill's love of writing people we want to root for before forcing us to watch them go through Hell blends perfectly with Rodriguez's un-idealised characters and marvellously detailed worlds. The series itself is a wonderful puzzle box that immerses, moves and thrills.





Greatest Comics

THE ULTIMATES™

Mark Millar • Bryan Hitch • Andrew Currie



ISSUE

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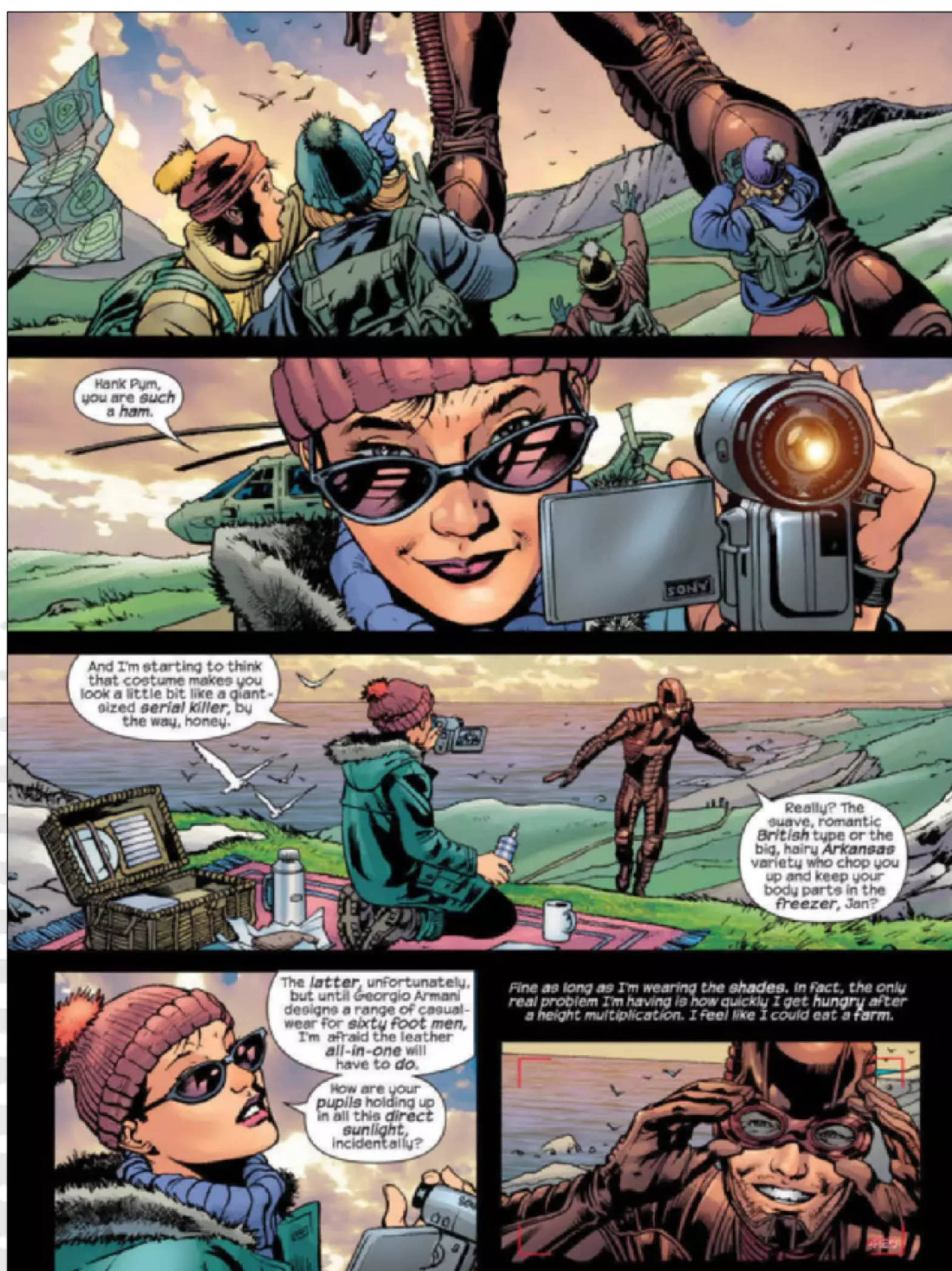
SUPER HUMAN

THE ULTIMATES VOL 1: SUPER HUMAN

Details Originally published The Ultimates #1-6 (2002) **Publisher** Marvel **Writer** Mark Millar **Artist** Bryan Hitch
Collected in The Ultimates: Super Human **Available digitally** Comixology, Marvel Unlimited

The Ultimates is modern reimagining of Marvel's premier superhero team, the Avengers, although they aren't so super here; in fact, Cap, Iron Man, Hulk and the rest of the gang are a dysfunctional mess. Tony Stark is a struggling alcoholic prone to throwing up in his suit, Thor is considered to be a lunatic with a giant hammer, and Steve Rogers is a soldier built to fight without compromise.

It's a gritty, funny, and often shocking reinterpretation of the Avengers, and a gritty look at the implication of turning a bunch of ordinary people into war machines, groomed to fight a global war on terror. Artist Bryan Hitch presents these characters like you've never seen them before, while writer Mark Millar found brilliant ways to spin the origin story of the world's most famous superhero team. If you've enjoyed any of Marvel's recent movies, you owe it to yourself to give this a read.



ALICE IN SUNDERLAND: AN ENTERTAINMENT

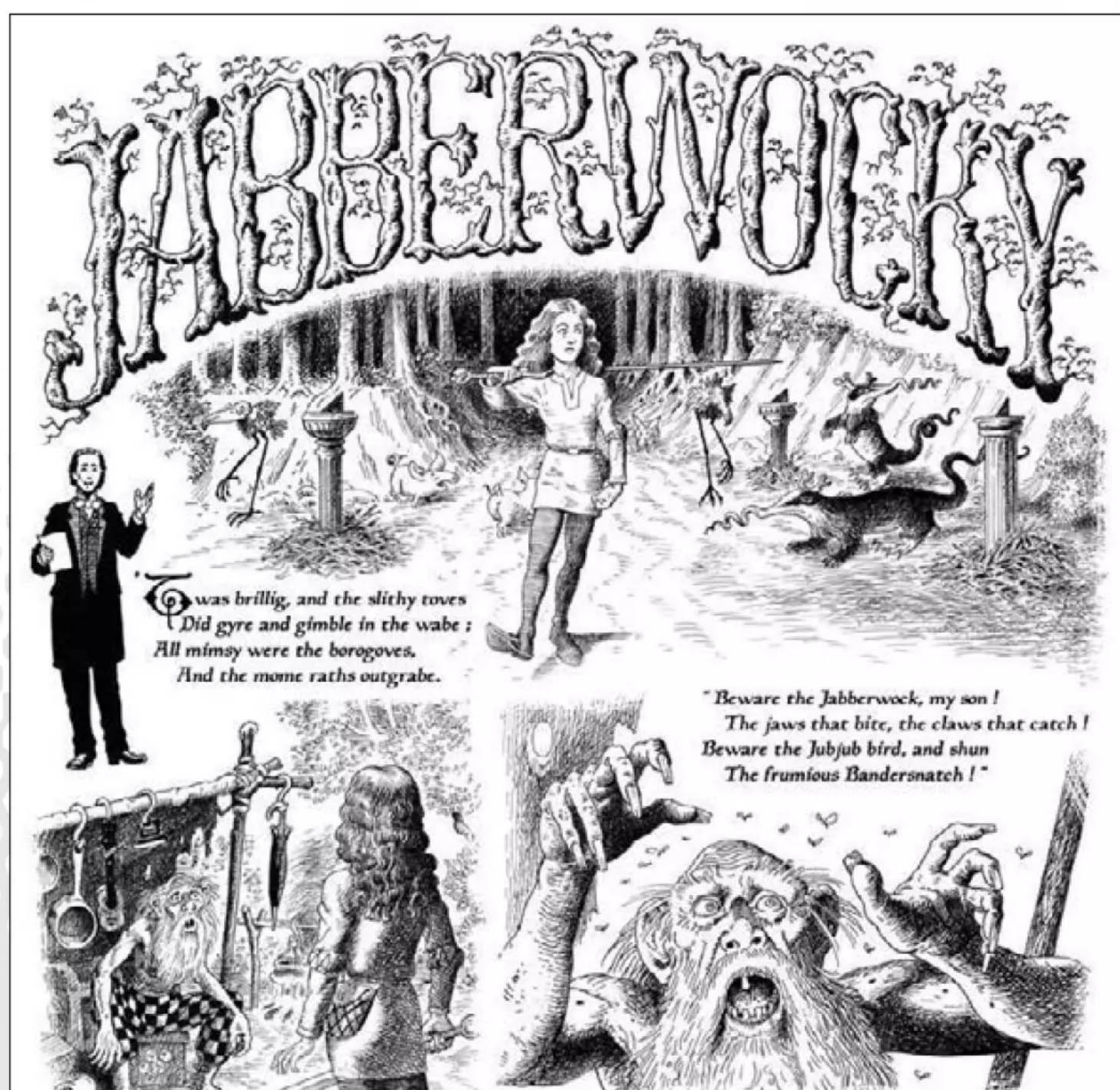
Details Originally published Alice In Sunderland: An Entertainment (2007)

Publisher Jonathan Cape **Writer** Bryan Talbot **Artist** Bryan Talbot

Collected in Alice In Sunderland: An Entertainment **Available digitally** N/A

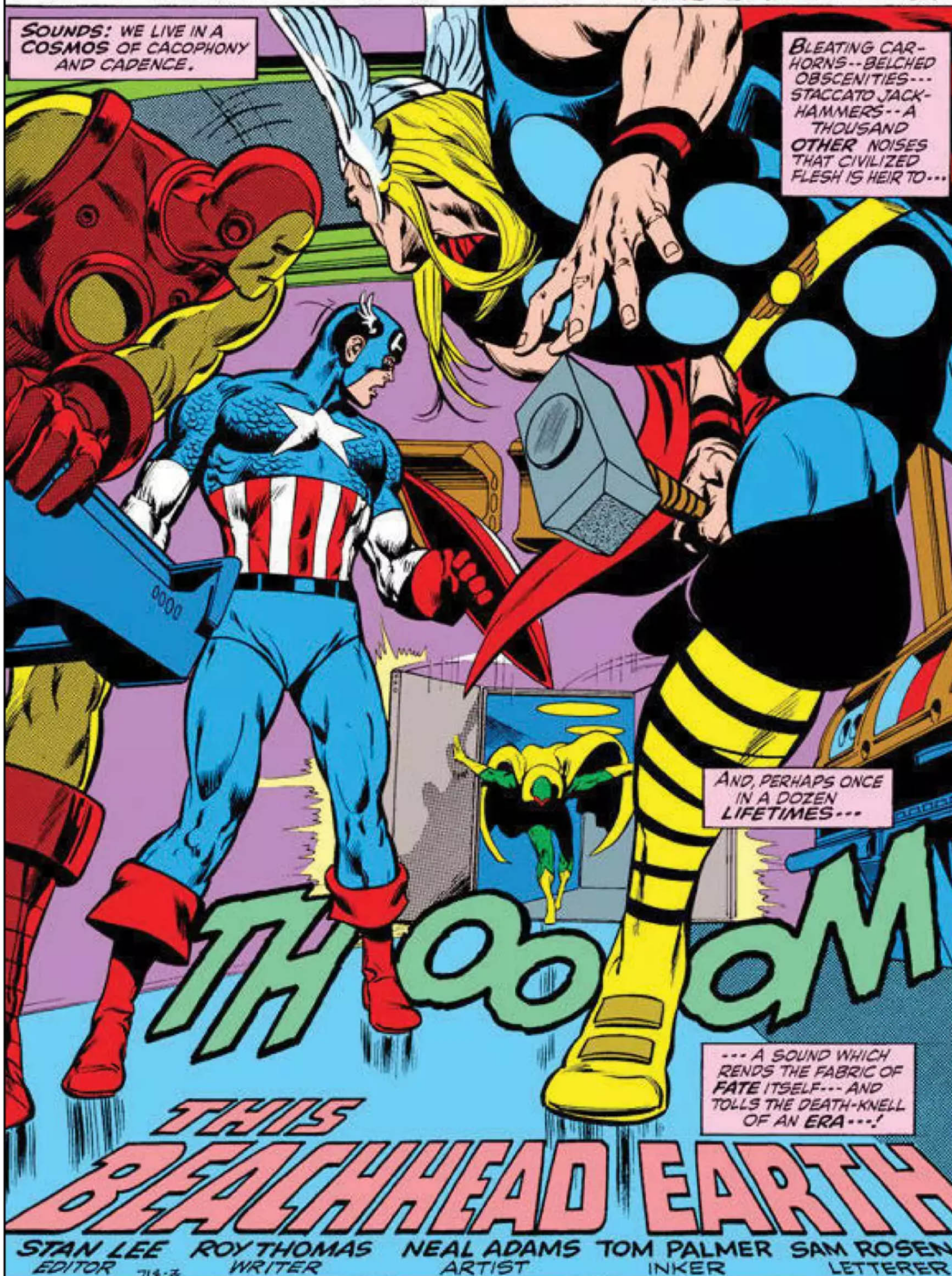
Bryan Talbot is, without doubt, the godfather of British comics. His unique detailing and wonderful layouts have inspired countless creators, while until recently his own stellar bibliography was often overlooked. The Costa award-winning artist began in the underground comix scene in the Sixties, and that punk attitude is never far beneath the surface of his later, highly polished works. *Alice In Sunderland* is, on one level, an exploration of the ties between Lewis Carroll and Sunderland, with a great focus on the history of the latter.

It's a clever move to take Carroll from the stuffy towers of Oxford to the gritty north-east that – Talbot posits – inspired the author far more. A grand entertainment in graphic novel form, *Alice In Sunderland* is more than a town history or a factfile for *Alice In Wonderland* fans; it also pushes the comics form in a number of new directions, both stunningly beautiful and groundbreakingly radical.



THE MIGHTY AVENGERS!

Greatest Comics



THE KREE/ SKRULL WAR

Details Originally published Avengers #89-97 (1971/2)

Publisher Marvel **Writer** Roy Thomas **Artist** Sal Buscema, Neal Adams

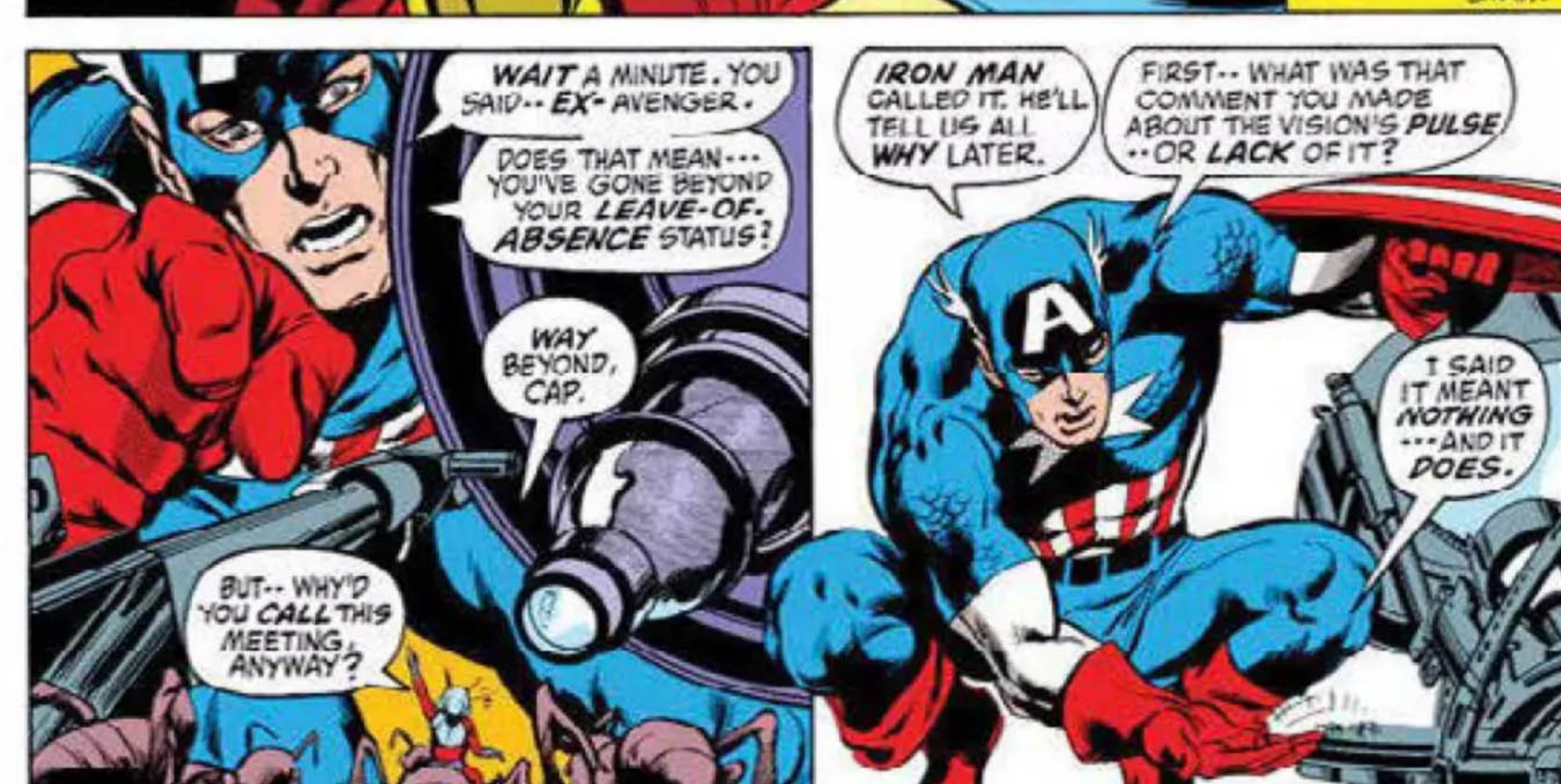
etc **Collected in** Avengers: Kree/Skrull War (£18.99) **Available digitally**

Comixology, Marvel Unlimited

Epic on an unprecedented scale, the *Kree-Skrull War* saw Marvel reference its own history in fan-pleasing depth for the first time as alien empires came to blows and an extended cast of Earth's Mightiest Heroes found themselves caught in the crossfire.

More than a template for all future Marvel events – from *Secret Wars* to *Civil War* (and probably some that don't have 'war' in the title too) – with its mixture of contemporary allegory (in this case a McCarthy-style US Senator hunting down alien infiltrators), angsty wrestling with moral dilemmas and good, honest superhero beatdowns, the *Kree/Skrull War* underpins *Avengers* mythology.

The Vision/Scarlet Witch romance blossoms and the fallout of Kree infiltration would return time and time again, but as the frontline for the defence of the entire Marvel cosmos, this is where the Avengers became more than just a sum of their parts, in a brilliant effort by one of Marvel's top-dog writers in the legendary and influential Roy Thomas.



75 YEARS of

MARVEL

from the GOLDEN AGE
to the SILVER SCREEN
by Roy Thomas





HISTORY LESSONS

In the Seventies, Roy Thomas became Marvel's first editor-in-chief after Stan Lee, making him the ideal candidate to write a new book about the company's 75-year history. We spoke to him about a life shaping the future of Marvel...

Thanks to Marvel Studios, millions of people are now familiar with characters that even just a few years ago would have been considered too risky for a film franchise. Those with a more established success record, such as Spider-Man and the X-Men, still command a following, and even creator Stan Lee has acquired celebrity status, with his signature film cameos and even his own convention.

Such is the company's appeal that US TV channel ABC recently screened a one-hour documentary, *Marvel 75 Years: From Pulp To Pop!* to honour it reaching an important anniversary, while book publisher Taschen has contributed its own celebration in the form of a 720-page hardcover, *75 Years Of Marvel: From The Golden Age To The Silver Screen*. A tome worthy of the famous 'mighty Marvel' moniker,



it has been written by former editor-in-chief – and in the early Seventies, the first successor to Stan Lee – Roy Thomas, who tells its story from its humble beginnings in 1939 through to its major reinvention in the Sixties, right up to becoming the powerhouse it is today.

Helped by editor Josh Baker, Thomas has assembled nearly 2,000 photographs of vintage comic-books, original artwork, toys and collectables, as well as a four-foot fold-out timeline and biographies of key creators. Thomas' Marvel career began in 1965 as a writer, producing memorable runs on both the *X-Men* and *The Avengers*, with a hand in creating characters like Ultron, the Vision and Wolverine. We spoke to him about his life, career and Stan Lee.

Your book details 75 years of Marvel Comics history. How did it all begin?

It began with Martin Goodman, who published pulp magazines from around 1933, and switched to comics in 1939. The company was called Timely Publications back then, and didn't change its name to Marvel until later, but you can see the first use of the word on the cover of *Marvel Science Stories*, a pulp magazine from 1938, later called *Marvel Tales*. Goodman must have liked it because *Marvel Comics* #1 came out in 1939, and was the book that introduced the original Human Torch and the Sub-Mariner. It was a huge hit.

You were born in 1940, so do you remember those early comics?

From the age of about five, I started to become interested in comic-books, especially *Superman*, *Batman* and *All-Star Comics* – which featured the Justice Society of America – followed closely by *The Human Torch*, *Sub-Mariner* and *Captain America* at Timely, and of course *Captain Marvel* [Shazam], but I would read any I could get my hands on. By the mid-Forties, when I started reading, superheroes were beginning to fade out, so Timely had only kept the three I mentioned, but I am vaguely aware of others that it published, such as *Miss America*, and later *Sun Girl*, *Venus* and *Marvel Boy*.

So if superheroes weren't popular, what was Timely doing instead?

It was trying to branch out – it released a lot of funny comics, Westerns and then war comics in the Fifties. By then, the superheroes were mostly gone, but hardly missed, I'm sure, by the writers and artists in general. I do remember the first Captain America revival of the early Fifties, though, introducing him as a 'commie-smasher', and I loved it. I've always thought the Soviet-controlled communists made as good a set of villains as the Nazis.

Was your joy of comics affected by the general view in the Fifties that they were ➤



Thomas at his desk at Marvel.

➤ **bad for children? People had comic-book burnings, is that right?**

My parents never stopped me from reading comics. I did once have to donate some comics to a bonfire in Jackson, Missouri, during the height of that period in my junior high days. I just remember a big pile of them there on the grounds of the parish hall, but I actually managed to sneak home a few from Ziff Davis, whose painted covers appealed to me, such as *Wild Boy Of The Congo* and *Space Busters*.

A lot of companies went out of business. What happened to those that survived?

They got watered down, because if they did anything that wasn't approved of by the Comics Code Authority [an organisation set up to monitor content], they had to change it. So what you got – and what was in place for many years, well into my time and beyond – was self-censorship.

So how did we go from that to the re-emergence of the superhero in the Sixties?

Julie Schwartz at DC helped to revive a bunch of its old superheroes in new costumes, starting in 1956, and Archie Comics had *The Fly* by 1959, so it made sense for Marvel to try it again too. But this time, as he's often said, Stan Lee told Goodman he wanted to do it "his way" – and he was teamed with the equally great

Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko, and the three of them changed comics for the better.

It really had that much of an impact?

I bought *Fantastic Four* from issue #1, and there was just something different and offbeat about them and the other characters, Spider-Man in particular. Thor and Ant-Man were less revolutionary – more like DC characters – but they were good too. When I read DC comics, I usually felt that I had to go into the mindset of being a kid again, but with Marvel it was just a little more sophisticated.

You started with the company in 1965, and you had a hand in creating characters. What was that like?

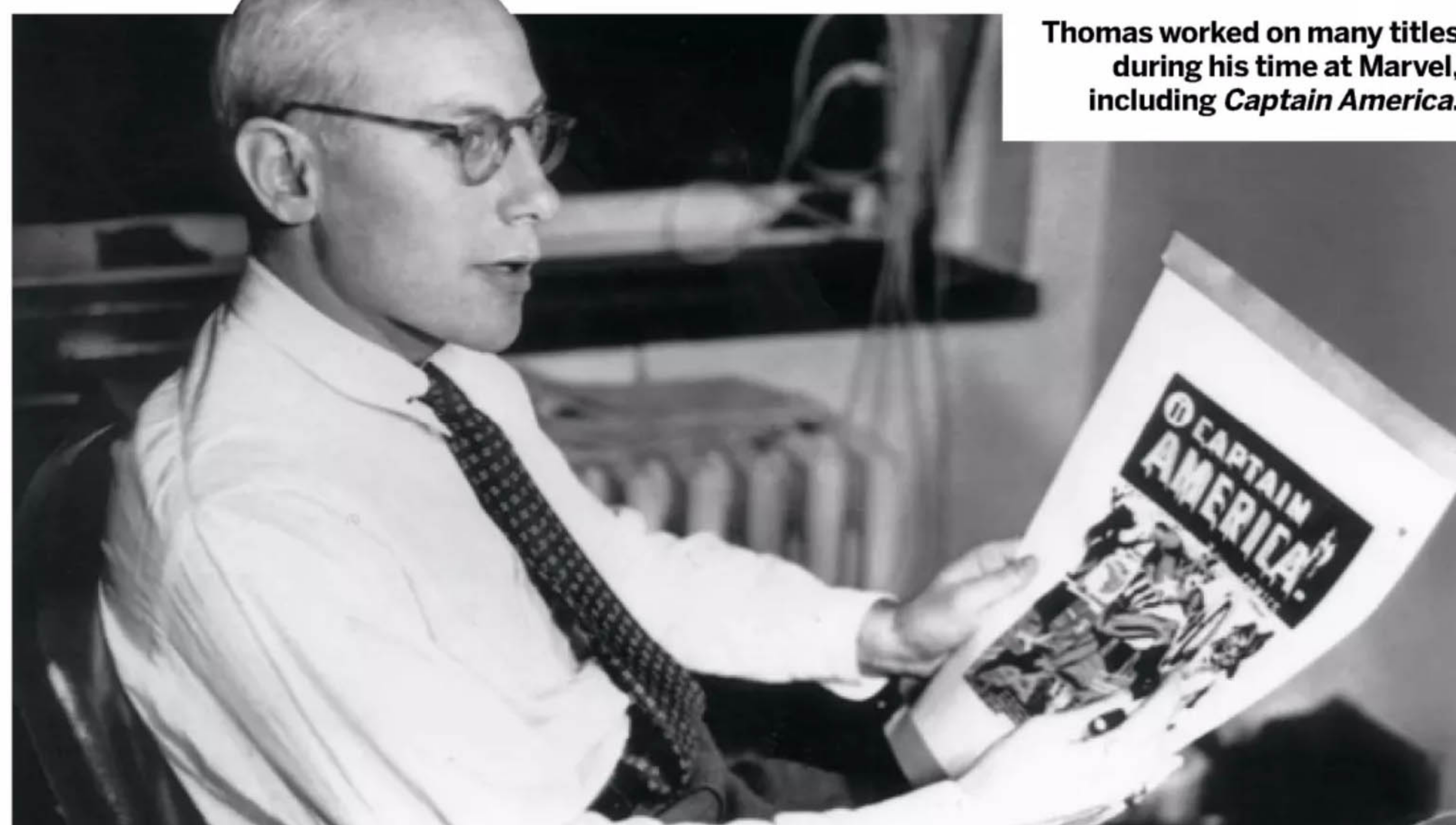
Fun, although I avoided co-creating too many heroes, as I knew I wouldn't own them. Had I known that one day Marvel would arrange a fairer distribution of funds, I'd have created a lot more. But a number of the notions I co-created were done as editor; characters like Wolverine, Brother Voodoo, Werewolf by Night, Man-Thing, Marvel's Dracula, even to some extent Luke Cage. Some were my idea, some were Stan's, and I would develop them and turn them over to a writer. Occasionally, I couldn't resist co-creating a new character – like Iron Fist – or I'd come up with a new character with an old name, like the Vision.

Iron Man was just one of the many characters that Thomas worked on.



75 Years Of Marvel includes many of Thomas' collected pictures.

“WHEN I READ DC COMICS, I USUALLY FELT THAT I HAD TO GO INTO A MINDSET OF BEING A KID AGAIN”
ROY THOMAS



Thomas worked on many titles during his time at Marvel, including *Captain America*.



ROY WONDER

We take a look at the career highlights of Roy Thomas, the comic-book legend

**THE KREE/SKRULL WAR
AVENGERS #89-97
(1971)**

The Avengers intervene in a cosmic battle between the Skrull and Kree races, with Sal Buscema, John Buscema and Neal Adams providing the art for a truly epic storyline.



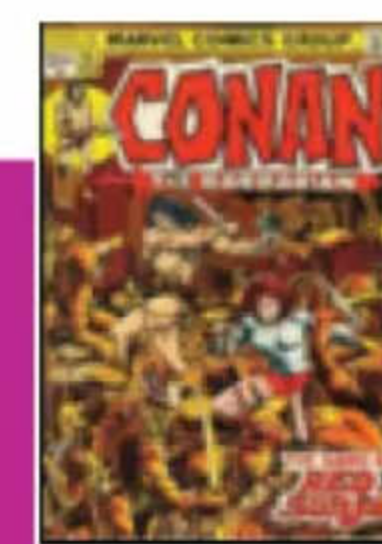
**A MONSTER CALLED... MORBIUS
AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #101-102
(1971)**

Thomas was the first writer to work on the main *Spider-Man* book other than Stan Lee, with his first issue addressing why Peter Parker had grown four extra arms.



**THE SONG OF RED SONJA
CONAN THE BARBARIAN #24
(1973)**

After introducing Conan to comics, Thomas was able to add creator Robert E Howard's female warrior Red Sonja, who would later spin off into her own solo series.





The 75 Years Of Marvel book includes all your favourite characters.



Many of the original covers will feature in the book.

What was Stan Lee like to work with? And how about Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko?

Stan isn't perfect; no one is. But he was great to work with and a wonderful teacher, even when he wasn't really trying to be. I liked Jack, but never had much to do with him. Steve was distant, but we were friendly, and he once came to a party at the apartment I lived in, several years after he'd left Marvel. John Romita, Marie Severin, Herb Trimpe and Sol Brodsky, they were a great crew, but my favourite all-time collaborator was probably John Buscema.

How did you go about bringing the rights to Conan to Marvel Comics?

Conan and his world are a wonderful concept, and [artist] Barry Smith and I did such a good job of bringing it to comics, ditto Gil Kane and John Buscema later. Why be overly modest? It didn't succeed because we did a lousy job, right?



THE TRIUMPH OF MAGNETO UNCANNY X-MEN #60-63 (1979)

A strange time in the X-Men's history, when the title faced cancellation. But that didn't stop Thomas and artist Neal Adams producing great work.

Your fondness for the Golden Age was evident in the creation of *The Invaders*. Was that a highlight for you?

The Invaders was never a big hit, but it did okay. I thought it was a good way for me to write characters I loved, like the original Torch, Cap and Namor, without having to co-ordinate them with other comics. I was tired of being involved in the day-to-day Marvel universe, even though I'd done a fair amount to help solidify it.

You served as editor-in-chief from 1972-74. What was your focus then?

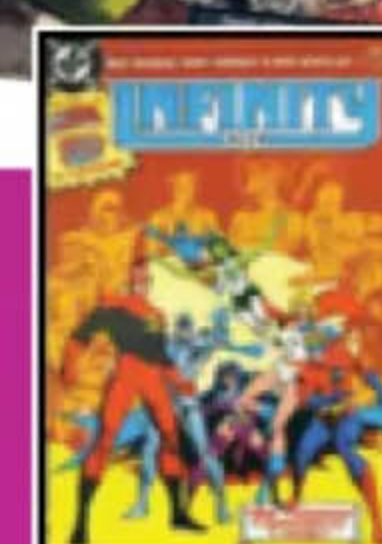
Mostly, we had to grow. My move to editor-in-chief and Stan's to publisher coincided with our mutual desire to try different genres. Marvel became the top comics company during that period, though due more to Stan and other factors. But I like to think I did my part to help it along.

Sometimes I wish I'd stayed around longer



RETURN TO THE GOLDEN AGE ALL-STAR SQUADRON #1-3 (1981)

After moving to DC, Thomas got to explore his love of the company's Golden Age characters, launching an *All-Star* series set in the Forties.



THE GENERATIONS SAGA INFINITY INC #1-10 (1984)

Also at DC, Thomas span another series out of the *All-Star Squadron*, bringing a team together based on the heroes' offspring, created with artist Jerry Ordway.

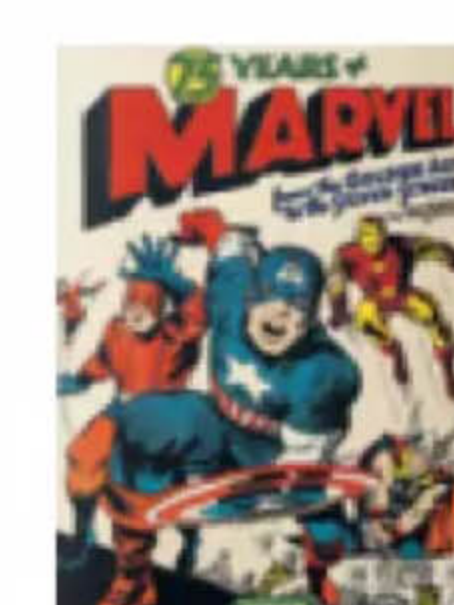
as editor-in-chief, but I did a lot of other interesting things with my life after I left the job, so I can't really regret that.

You continued to write for Marvel, but later joined DC. How did the two companies compare?

I didn't want to work for Marvel if I couldn't continue to edit my own work, so when I got stonewalled, I left. DC did some great books in the Eighties – *Watchmen* and *The Dark Knight Returns* – but they're not to my taste, especially the latter. I find things I like, but they're not for me, despite my respect for their creators.

With Marvel's movie success, is it exciting to see your creations come to life?

Yes, especially seeing the Vision. What I've seen so far of the next *Avengers* movie [*Age Of Ultron*] makes me think I might like it nearly as much as – or even more than – the first, and I liked that one a lot. It's one of the few movies in recent years I've actually seen more than once.



75 Years Of Marvel: From The Golden Age To The Silver Screen by Roy Thomas and Josh Baker is available now, published by Taschen, RRP £135.

15th ANNIVERSARY EDITION

DC
Greatest Comics

b a t m a n

ARKHAM ASYLUM

A SERIOUS HOUSE ON SERIOUS EARTH

g R A N T *m* O R R I S O N

d A V E *m* c K E A N

ARKHAM ASYLUM: A SERIOUS HOUSE ON SERIOUS EARTH

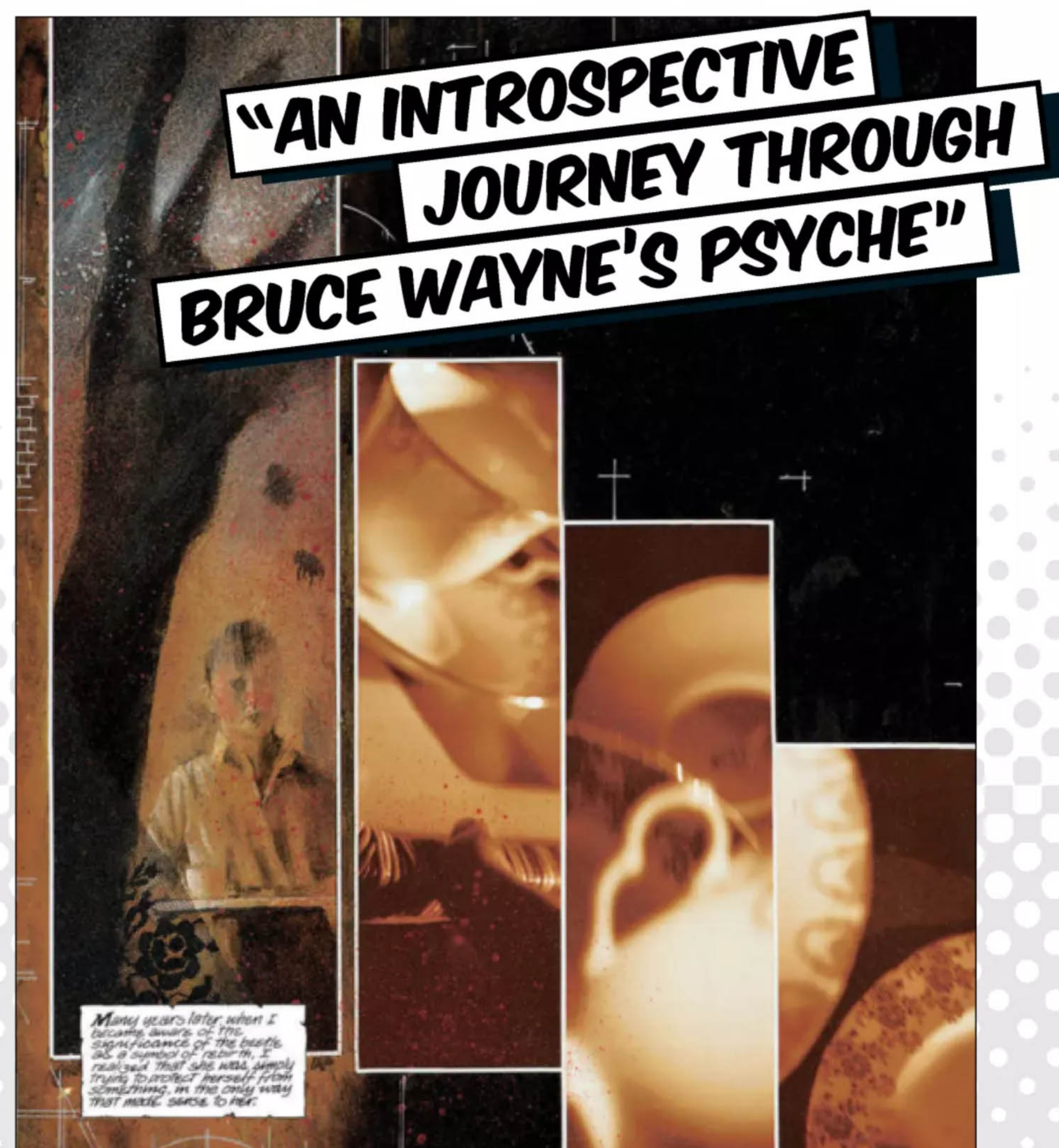
Details Originally published Arkham Asylum: A Serious House On Serious Earth (1989) **Publisher** DC

Writer Grant Morrison **Artist** Dave McKean **Collected in** Arkham Asylum: A Serious House On Serious Earth

Available digitally Comixology, iBookstore

Arkham Asylum takes a much darker look at both Batman and Bruce Wayne, throwing man and mask up against a wall and looking at the different shadows they cast. It was the book that defined the more gothic direction the Batman franchise would travel through the Nineties, Grant Morrison using the imposing architecture of the eponymous Arkham Asylum to frame an introspective journey through Wayne's broken psyche.

With references to Sigmund Freud and his structural theory of the mind, Carl Jung and his psychological archetypes and constant call-backs to the multiple fairy tales and folklore Batman built on, *Arkham Asylum* manages to succinctly define Bruce Wayne (and the villains he encounters). The fractal and unconventional art of Dave McKean punctuates Morrison's grim narrative, and the loose panels often carry far more impact than the text supporting them. This is a more realistic confrontation of what Batman is than we've seen in any other run, and the graphic novel beautifully conveys the chaos, doubt and polarity that's intrinsic to Batman's character.



WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS?

Details Originally published *Why Are You Doing This?* (2003)

Publisher Fantagraphics **Writer** Jason **Artist** Jason

Collected in *Why Are You Doing This?* **Available digitally** Comixology

Jason is, quite simply, the best comic creator that many have never heard of. The Norwegian genius creates these short – and often silent – works that defy expectations and cross genre barriers. While many of his titles feature sci-fi concepts, it's the minimalist and introspective approach to characters and relationships that really set his titles apart.

Why Are You Doing This? is a Hitchcockian slow-burning thriller with a depressed protagonist thrown into his worst nightmare. As if wallowing in his break-up wasn't enough, his best friend is murdered, with the finger of blame pointed firmly at him.

Jason's trademark anthropomorphic animals serve no deeper purpose other than to immerse the reader deeper in the world he creates, yet they're cute funny animals, which is a great juxtaposition with the existential plot.

The fast-flowing narrative cleverly gives us the answers to the various questions throughout the pages of the graphic novel, with every panel counting. It's both a work of art and a fantastic thriller.



DOOM PATROL: CRAWLING FROM THE WRECKAGE

Details Originally published *Doom Patrol* #19-25 (1989) **Publisher** Vertigo
Writer Grant Morrison **Artist** Richard Case **Collected in** *Doom Patrol: Vol 1 - Crawling From The Wreckage* **Available digitally** Comixology, Kindle

The Doom Patrol, a group of superpowered misfits led by a wheelchair-bound genius, is often dismissed as DC's *X-Men* knock-off. The 'knock-off', however, was published in 1963, with *X-Men* arriving only three months later, leading original writer Arnold Drake to suspect shenanigans from Stan Lee. The title floundered after the Silver Age until *Animal Man* writer Grant Morrison was hired in 1989, and then the madness began.

Dismissing characters he didn't need and introducing the likes of the now-famous Crazy Jane, a woman with 64 different personalities, and the sentient transvestite road Danny the Street, Morrison created a surreal masterpiece, weaving Dada, secret societies, the William S Burroughs cut-up technique, the writings of Jorge Luis Borges, the Painting that Ate Paris, the thing under the Pentagon, Flex Mentallo and the terrifying Scissormen into a sensational run.

It defies explanation, except that it is glorious. And Arnold Drake heartily approved.

"DEFIES EXPLANATION,
EXCEPT THAT IT
IS GLORIOUS"



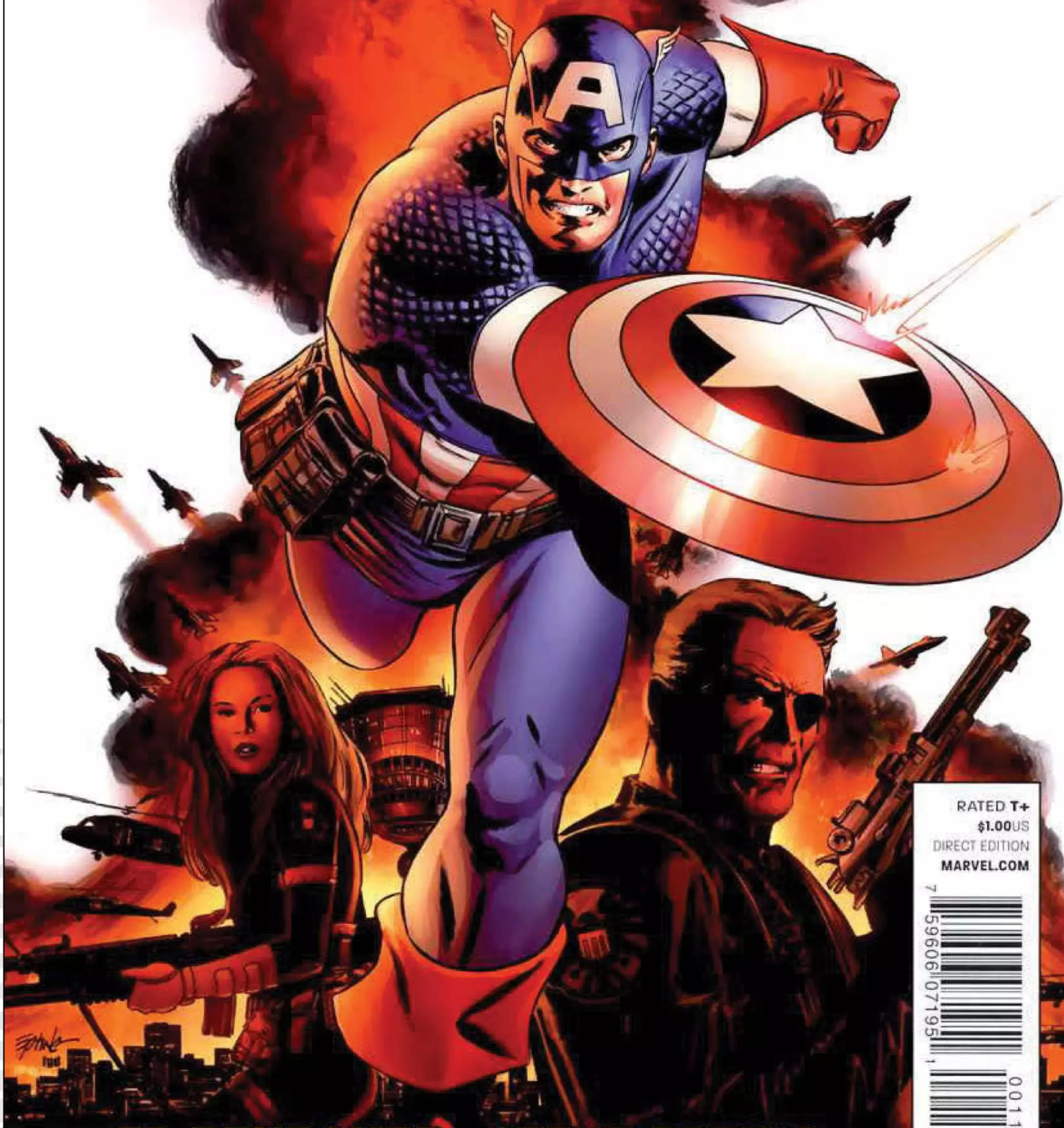
MARVEL

MARVEL'S GREATEST COMICS

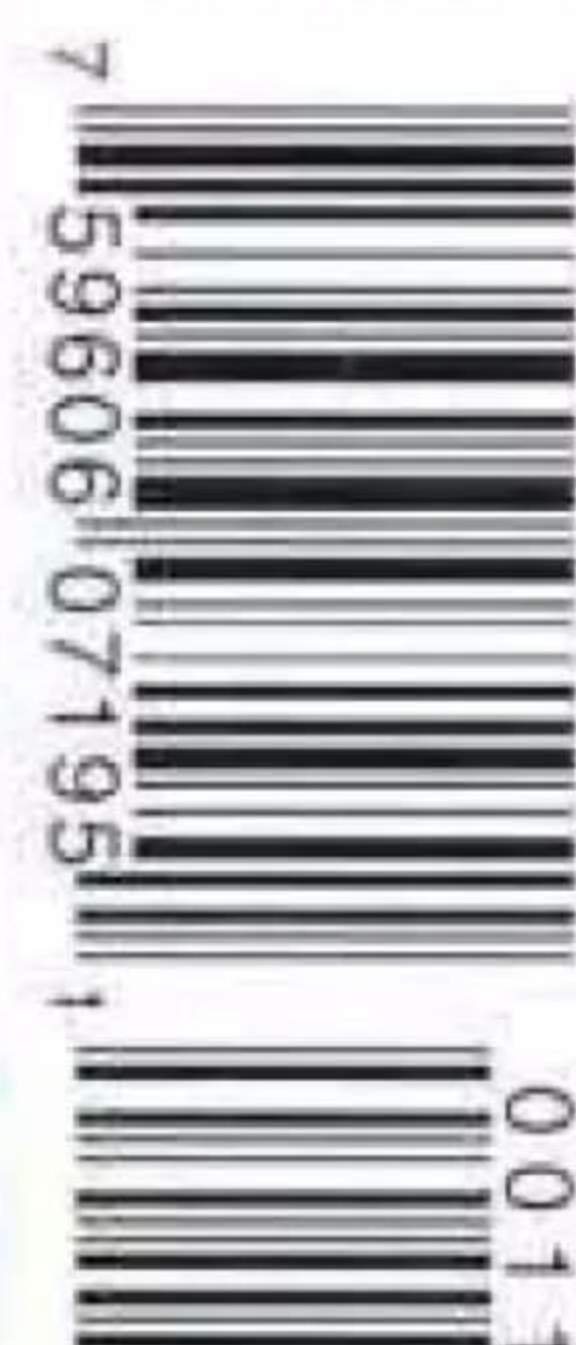
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Greatest Comics

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CAPTAIN AMERICA



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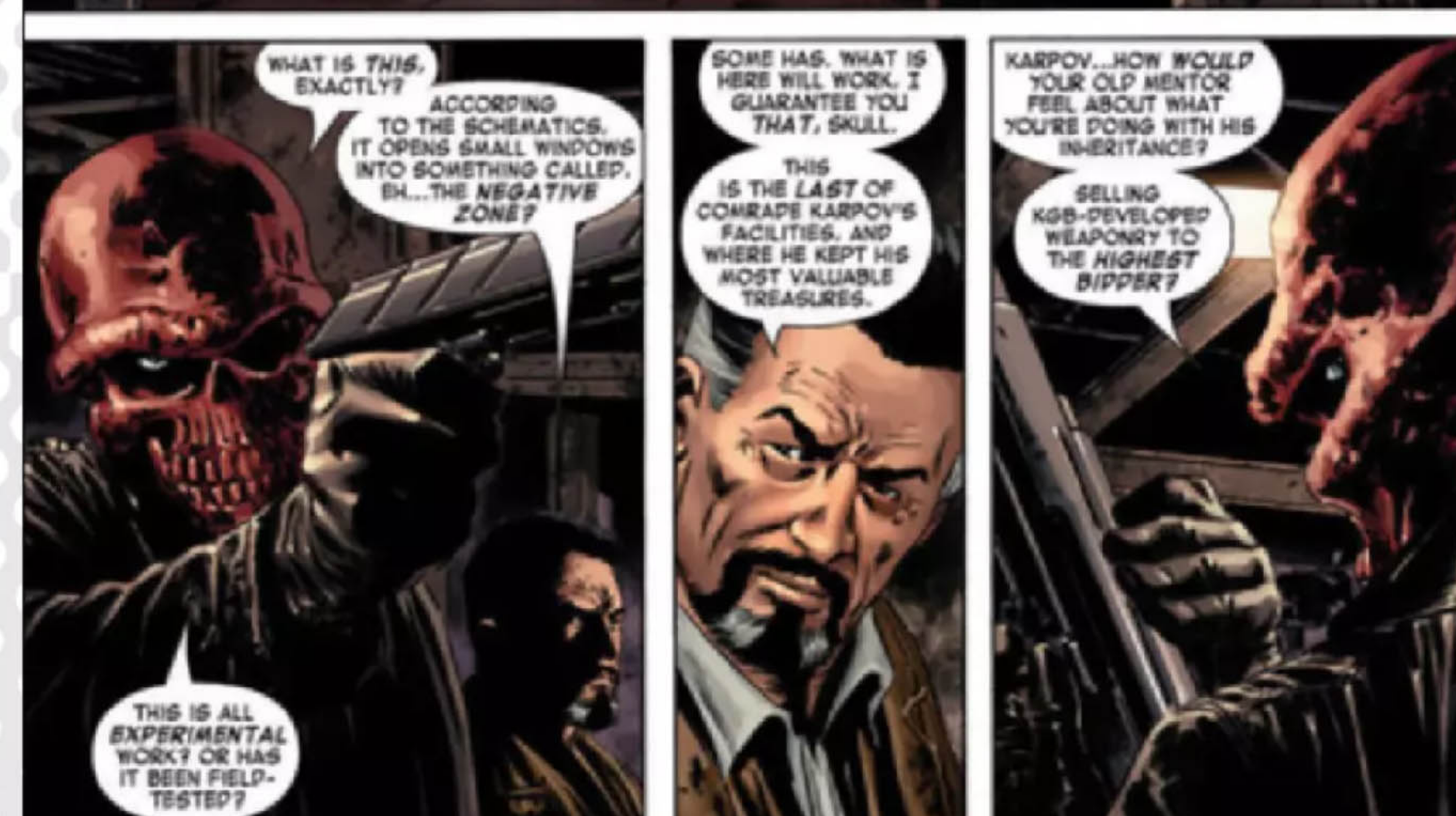
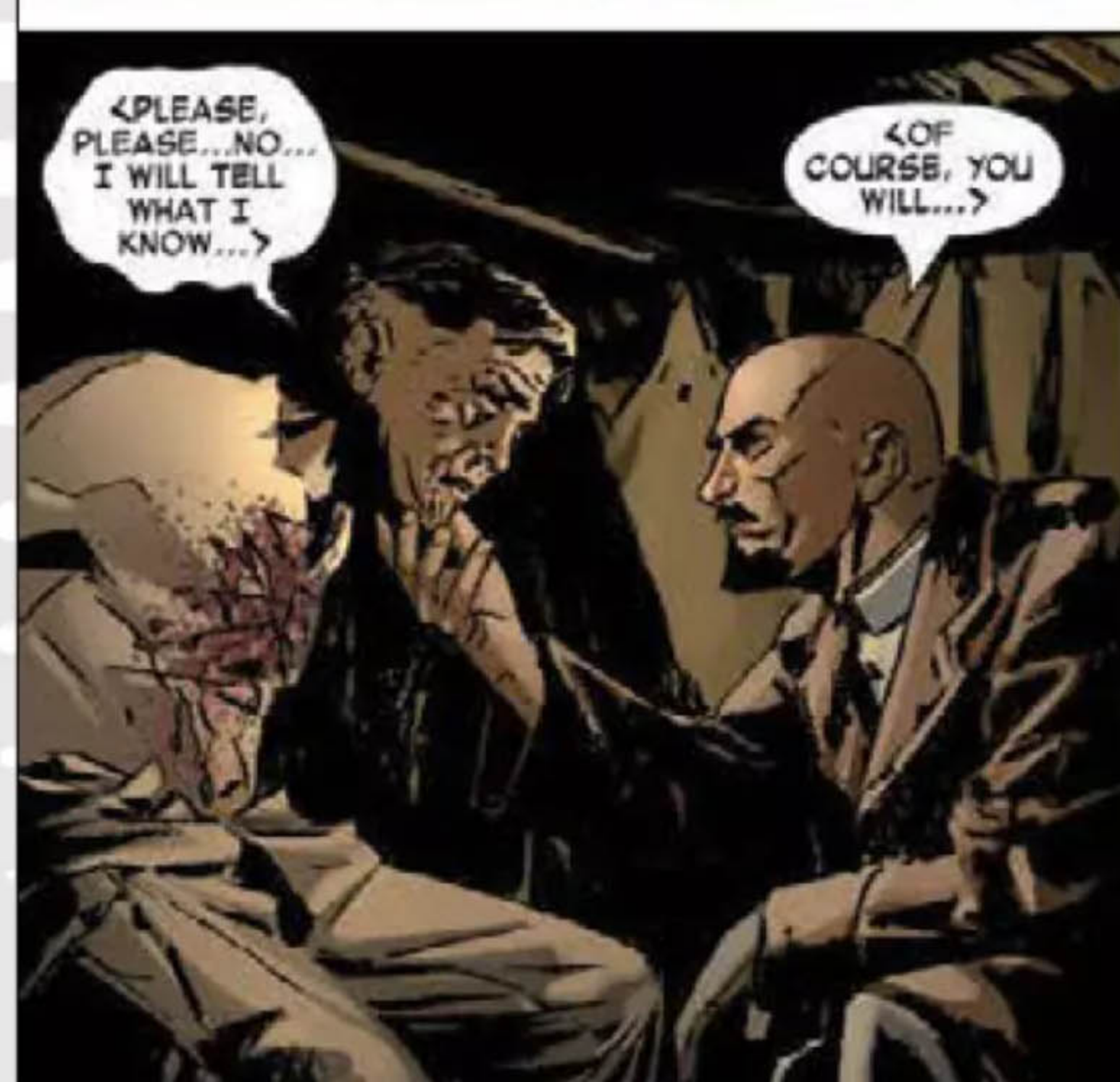
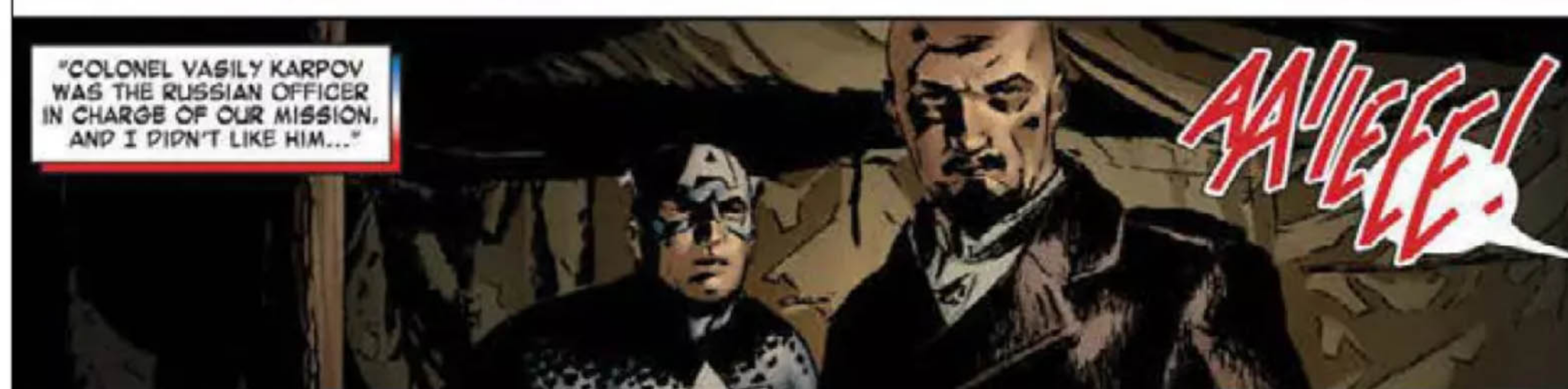
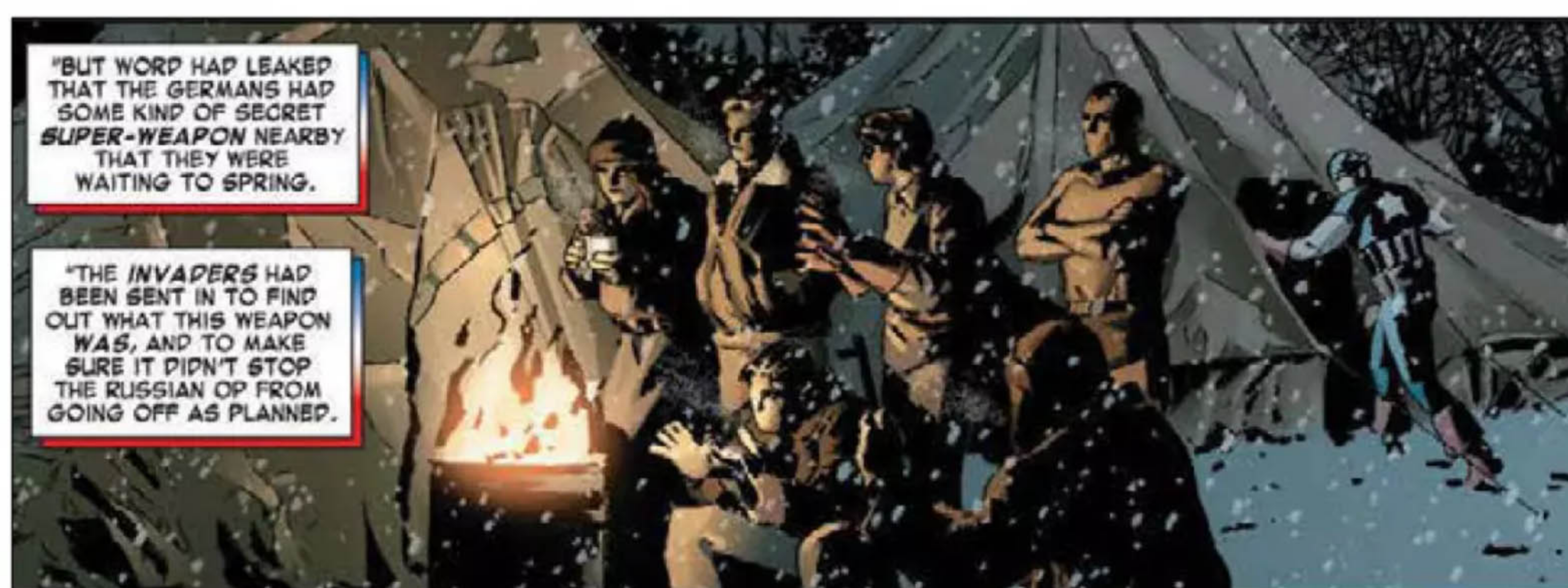


CAPTAIN AMERICA: OUT OF TIME

Details Originally published Captain America #1-9 (2004) **Publisher** Marvel **Writer** Ed Brubaker **Artist** Steve Epting
Collected in Captain America: Vol 1 – Winter Soldier **Available digitally** Comixology, Marvel Unlimited

It can be pretty difficult to know where to start with a character when their legacy stretches back across 70 years. But if you've been enjoying Steve Rogers' on-screen adventures, there isn't a better place to start than with Ed Brubaker's stunning Marvel debut, *Winter Soldier*. Not only is it the perfect introduction to Captain America, it's also a gripping espionage thriller, managing to build a new history for Cap without rewriting the old one entirely.

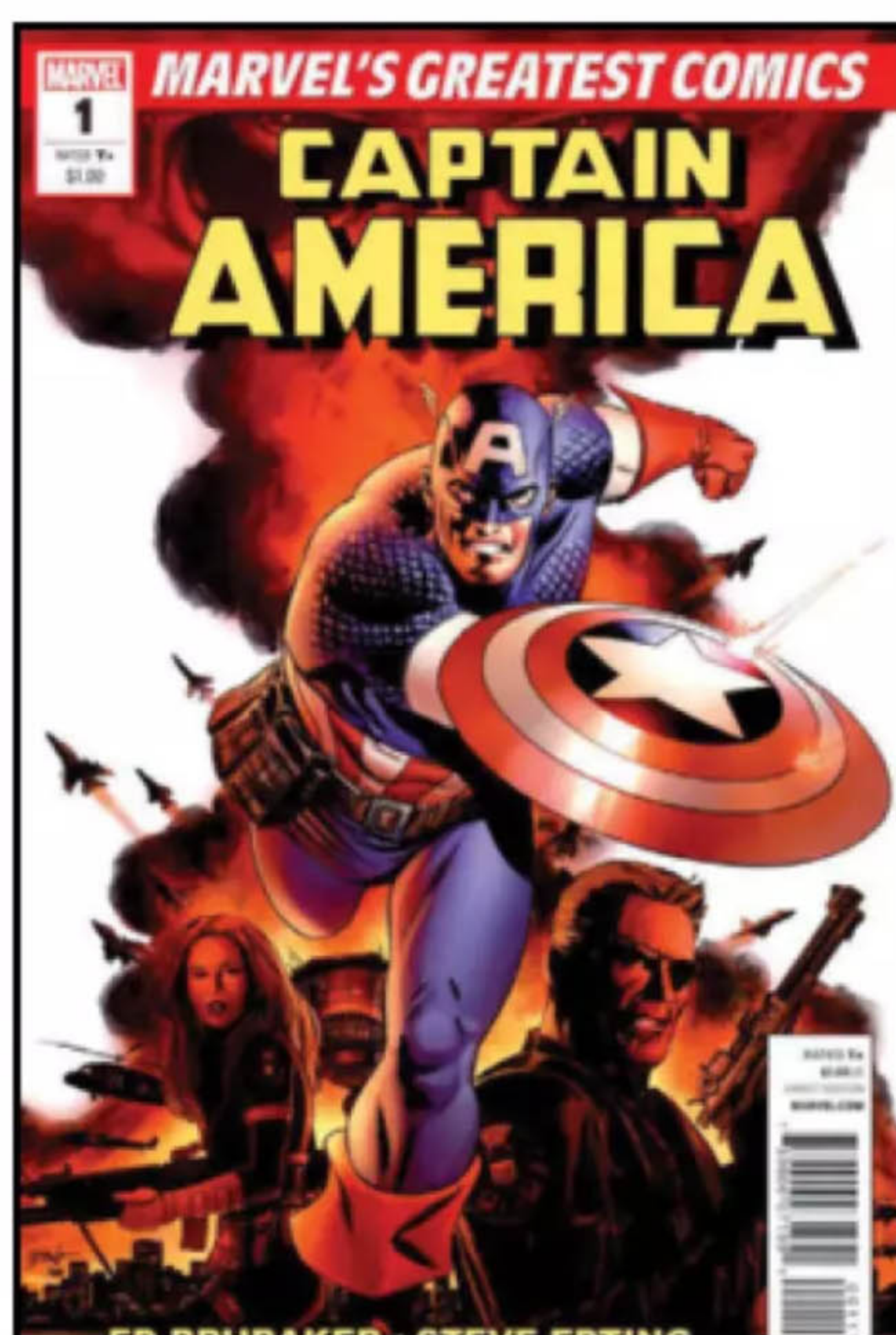
As a ghost from Captain America's past makes a shocking return, Brubaker quickly establishes a new status quo that's entirely compelling. It's no surprise that this story arc provided the inspiration for the 2014 movie *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, which touched on many of the story beats laid out here. That said, this modern Marvel classic will still cause surprises with its twists and turns, even if you've seen the movie to death.



WHY WAS CAPTAIN AMERICA CREATED AND WHY DOES HE ENDURE?

HOME OF THE BRAVE





CAPTAIN AMERICA IS THE MOST FAMOUS PATRIOT, BUT HE WASN'T THE FIRST. WE BURROW INTO THE HEART OF THE AMERICAN COMIC-BOOK HERO, FROM WARTIME PROPAGANDA TO POST-WAR JINGOSIM, AND DISCOVER WHY CAPTAIN AMERICA HAS OUTLASTED HIS PEERS...

When it comes to eye-catching images on the newsstands, nothing quite beats a red, white and blue-bedecked superhero punching out Hitler. It's one of the most visceral covers in comics history, and with that iconic blow, Captain America joined World War II a full 12 months before the attack on Pearl Harbor, at a time when most of the US was ambivalent at best about entering the combat.

Captain America, aka Steve Rogers, appeared in his own series in 1940 at Marvel Comics (then called Timely). The creation of Joe Simon and Jack Kirby, Rogers knew his duty was to serve his country, and that meant enlisting in the service at any cost, despite his various physical ailments.

However, good ol' Cap was not the first hero to embody American patriotism. In January 1940, many months prior to Captain America's debut, Archie Comics (then MLJ) introduced The Shield, the alter-ego of Joe Higgins, who took his father's super-strength formula and became a superhero (yes, there is some similarity with Cap there – apparently back then superheroes had to share origin stories). Meanwhile, Superman, although technically Kryptonian, had been embraced as an icon of the American dream, standing, as we all know for truth, justice and the American way, and in her role as Ambassador to America, Wonder Woman took on the country's colours and ideology.

Others, such as Mr America, Ms America, Ms Victory, The Eagle, Phantom Eagle,

Captain Flag, Yankee Girl, US Jones, Patriot, Yank & Doodle, Fighting Yank and V-Man joined the ranks of heroes with a predilection for wearing an American flag (luckily, most of them came from different comic universes, otherwise the weekly hero meetings could have been very confusing for a while). Jason Dittmer, author of *Captain America And The Nationalist Superhero: Metaphors, Narratives And Geopolitics*, brings up past icons of national identity, pointing out that "ideas like 'Britain' or 'America' are so complex – all those people, all those institutions – that they need to be reduced down to a metaphor." He draws comparisons between the likes of Lady Liberty and Britannia, and superheroes of the Forties who took on the mantle of national identity.

There is another factor in the number of patriotic heroes. During the late Thirties and early Forties, many Jewish writers and creators had turned to the comics industry for employment, since at the time other publishing careers such as advertising were effectively closed to them. They frequently took conventionally American names as a way to 'become' American – you're probably familiar with Bob Kane as the creator of Batman, but his parents knew him as Robert Kahn, while Jacob Kurtzberg went through a few names before deciding on Jack Kirby. Many people have pointed out the close link ➤



By the time the US entered World War II in 1941, patriotic superheroes were a dime a dozen.

JACK KIRBY AND JOE SIMON KNEW THE NAZIS WERE THE BAD GUYS WELL BEFORE THE REST OF AMERICA MADE UP ITS MIND
JASON DITTMER

➤ between the creation of superhero comics and the oppression and discrimination of Jewish people.

Most of these writers were second-generation immigrants, struggling between identities. They were Jewish, and also American; they had a role in shaping the culture, but were also isolated from it in some way. Whether they were alien 'immigrants' like Superman or American-born soldiers such as Rogers, the throng of red, white and blue heroes was a way for Jewish creators to explore the national identity of their new home and mirror America back to itself in a way that only outsiders could. That's not to say it was purposeful: Kirby often denied the existence of any political messages in his work. Yet while he and his peers were inking the latest adventures, updates about the atrocities in Europe would filter through to them from friends and relatives still living across the Atlantic.

"They knew the Nazis were the bad guys well before the rest of America made up its mind," says Dittmer. It's not surprising that creators incorporated their frustration and horror into the fantastic adventures they wrote. It was a time when the real

world needed heroes. Pen and ink superheroes provided hope and wish fulfilment, showing caped crusaders fighting fascism with only a powerful uppercut and a pun-derful quip.

THE FALCON HAS TO TEACH CAPTAIN AMERICA TO SEE THE RACISM AT THE HEART OF AMERICAN CULTURE

JASON DITTMER

Of course, super-patriots were nothing without their supervillains. While comic-book heroes now duke it out with ferocious space creatures and unstable scientists, Captain America and his fellow patriots took on real threats, undisguised by symbolism or metaphors. Nazis and later Japanese soldiers were seen as real-life supervillains, which gave artists and writers the perfect foil for their fictional creations. With a nation's hatred of fascism supporting them, writers were free to litter their pages with grossly caricatured German and Japanese villains, typified as cowardly, pathetic sub-humans, yet still capable of giving America a bloody nose until the heroes came along. Most terrifying of all was

Cap's main foe, the Red Skull, a hideous crimson Nazi emblazoned with a swastika. As Dittmer notes, "One of the effects of these comics is that they import the moral clarity of the superhero universe into our own perceptions of 'real' history."

In some ways, these comic-books also served as low-level propaganda, presenting characters who were so besotted with their country that they'd risk their lives, and many books of the time included pleas for readers to support the war effort at home. "You too are a superhero," the comics seemed to say.

Comics were frequently shipped across to American troops as well, and were thought to foster feelings of national pride and bolster the morale of troops. However by the time 1945 came around, the war had been won, and slowly the effects of the war receded. *Captain America's* first run struggled on until 1949, when it ceased production. There were a few aborted attempts to continue the glory days when the nation was united against fascism, but ultimately the patriotic fervour of World War II faded. As the Cold War progressed, some comics tried to incorporate anti-communist storylines in the same way

With the war's end in 1945, characters like Captain America would struggle to find their place.

O CAPTAIN! MY CAPTAIN!

Who else took the Captain's name?

ISAIAH BRADLEY



In a storyline which echoed the real-life Tuskegee syphilis trials, African-American Isaiah and his peers were injected with

the super-serum without their consent. All the subjects died apart from Isaiah, who went on to be known as 'the black Captain America'

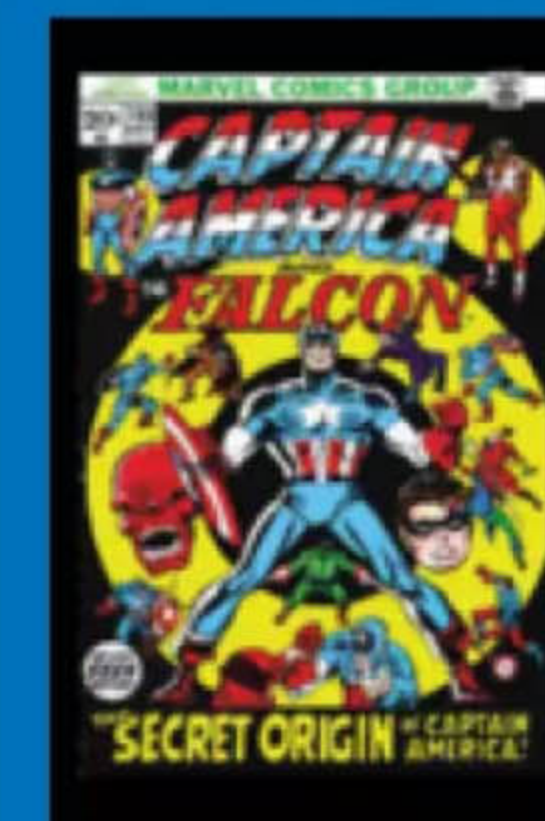
WILLIAM NASLAND



As a way to retcon Captain America's exploits during the Fifties, it was revealed that Truman had actually

appointed Nasland, aka second-stringer The Spirit Of '76, as Cap's replacement after the original had disappeared in combat.

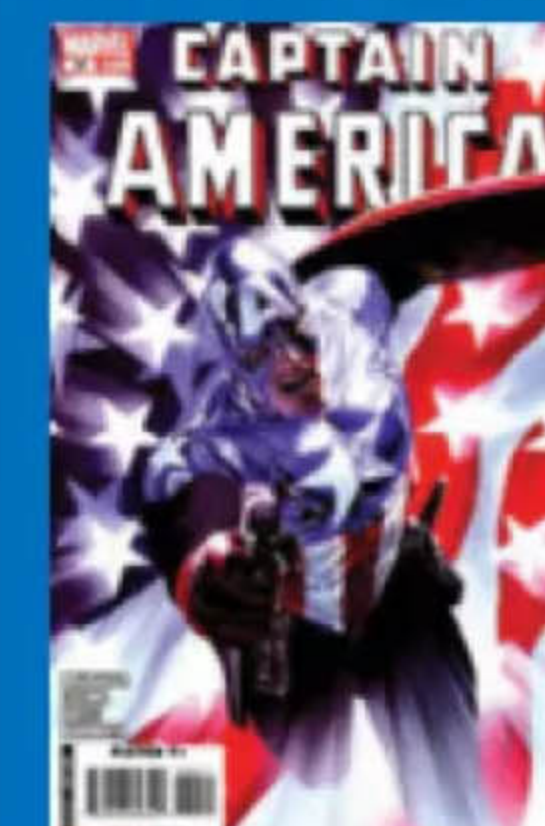
WILLIAM BURNSIDE



Beware the dangers of incomplete super-serum. Burnside took a bad batch, changed his name to Steve Rogers

and embarked on a crazed war against communism in the Fifties. Like so many other heroes, it all ended in forced suspended animation for him.

JAMES 'BUCKY' BARNES



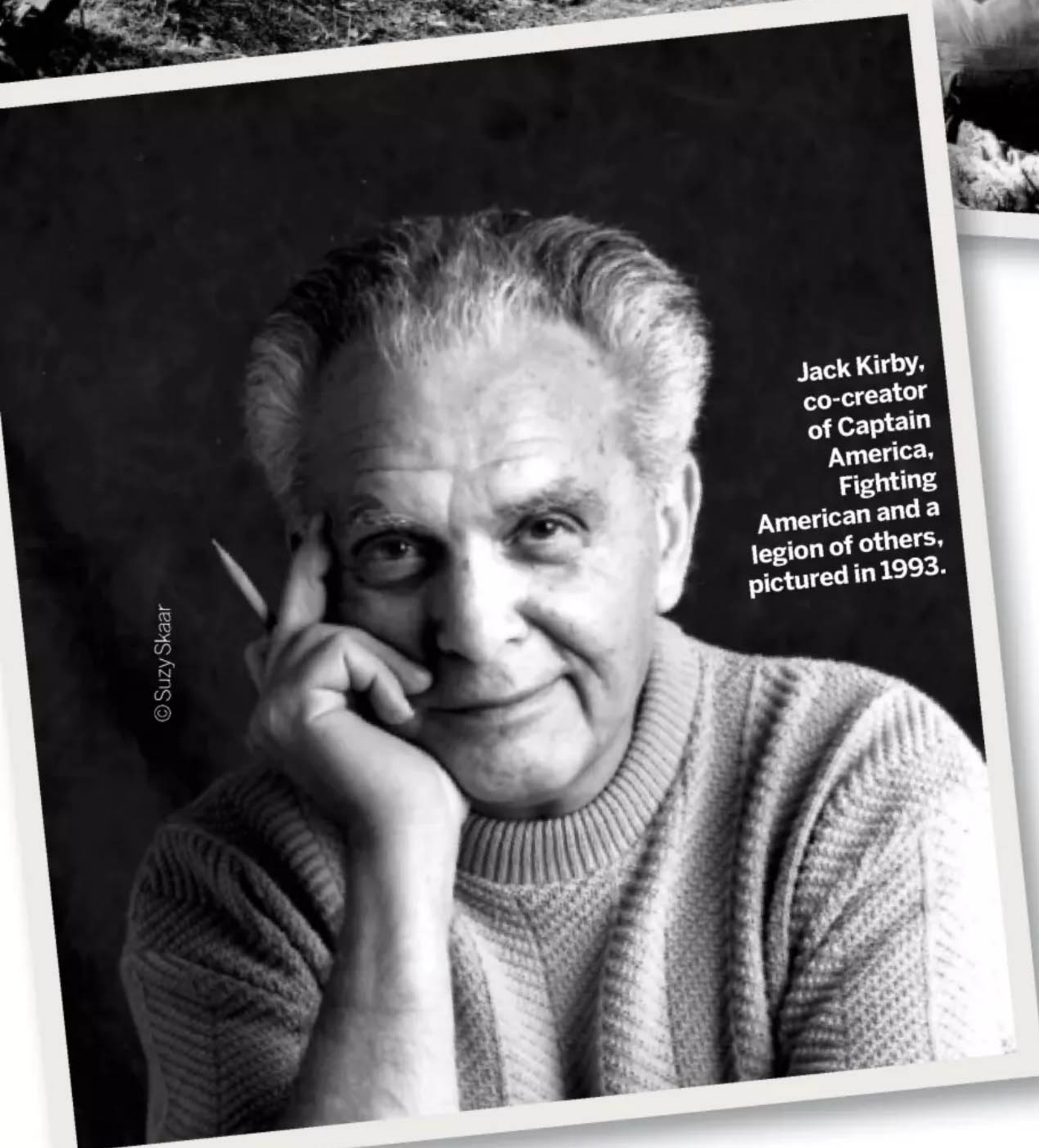
Following Rogers' death in 2007, Bucky took on the role of Captain America, according to his mentor's wishes,

although he operated by his own rules. Bucky faked his death after a period of controversy, and Rogers returned to take up the shield.



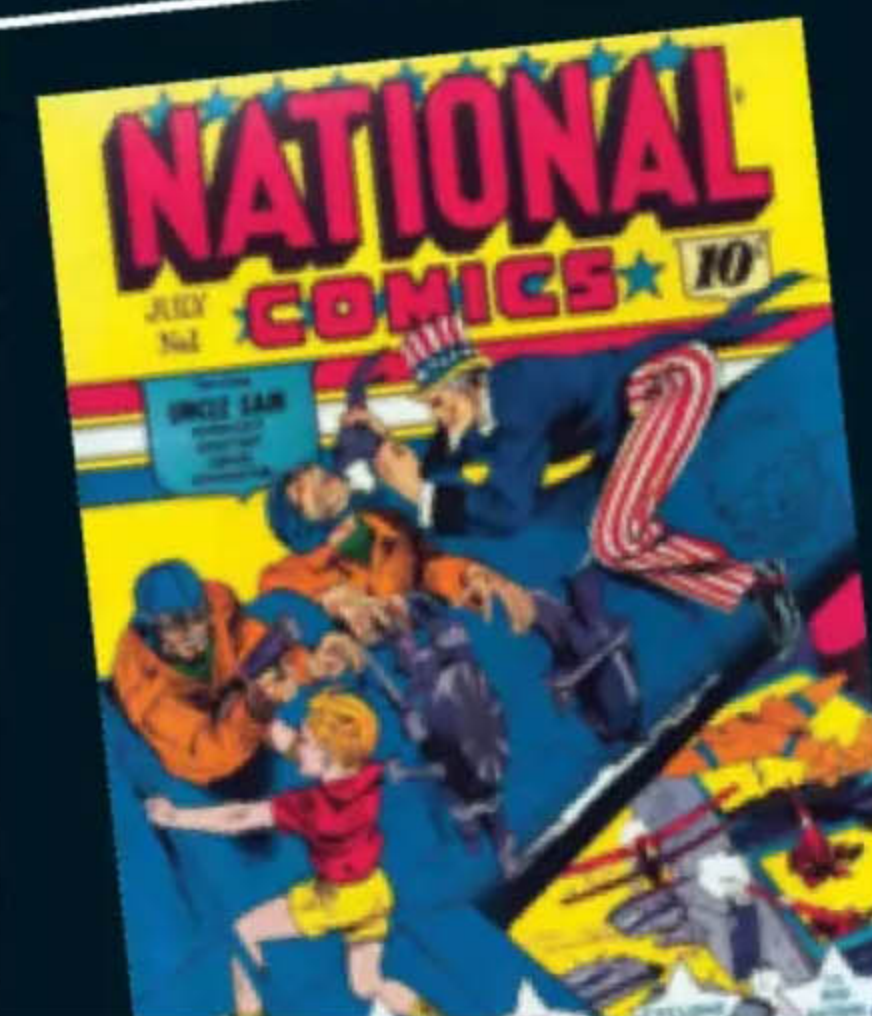
FREEDOM'S FIGHTERS

Who are the most patriotic superheroes?



Jack Kirby, co-creator of Captain America, *Fighting American* and a legion of others, pictured in 1993.

© Suzy Skaer

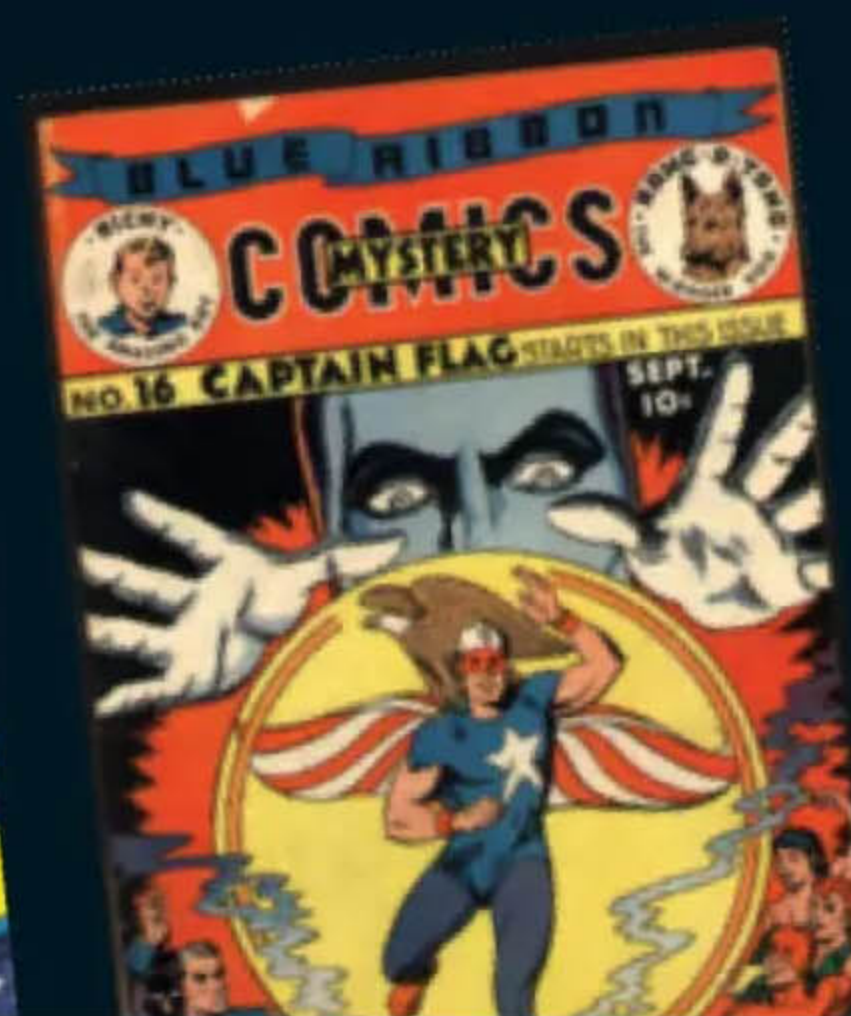


UNCLE SAM

Not that Uncle Sam, but a hero formed whenever the spirit of America binds itself to a dying patriot. Hosts for the spirit have included a revolutionary war hero, a fighter from WWI and Samuel, a WWII soldier.

First Appearance: *National Comics* #1

Patriot Points: The founding fathers themselves created the American spirit during some patriotic hi-jinks. Plus, his superpowers wax and wane according to the strength of American citizens' faith in freedom and liberty.



CAPTAIN FLAG

Tom Townsend was about to be killed by kidnappers when an eagle smashed through the window and carried him off to safety. Captain Flag was born.

First Appearance: *Blue Ribbon Comics* #16

Patriot Points: His sidekick is the symbol of American glory, the eagle; specifically, a bird called Yank the Eagle (that's not a euphemism). Yank was so patriotic, she even brought an American flag back to the nest, which Tom repurposed as his costume.

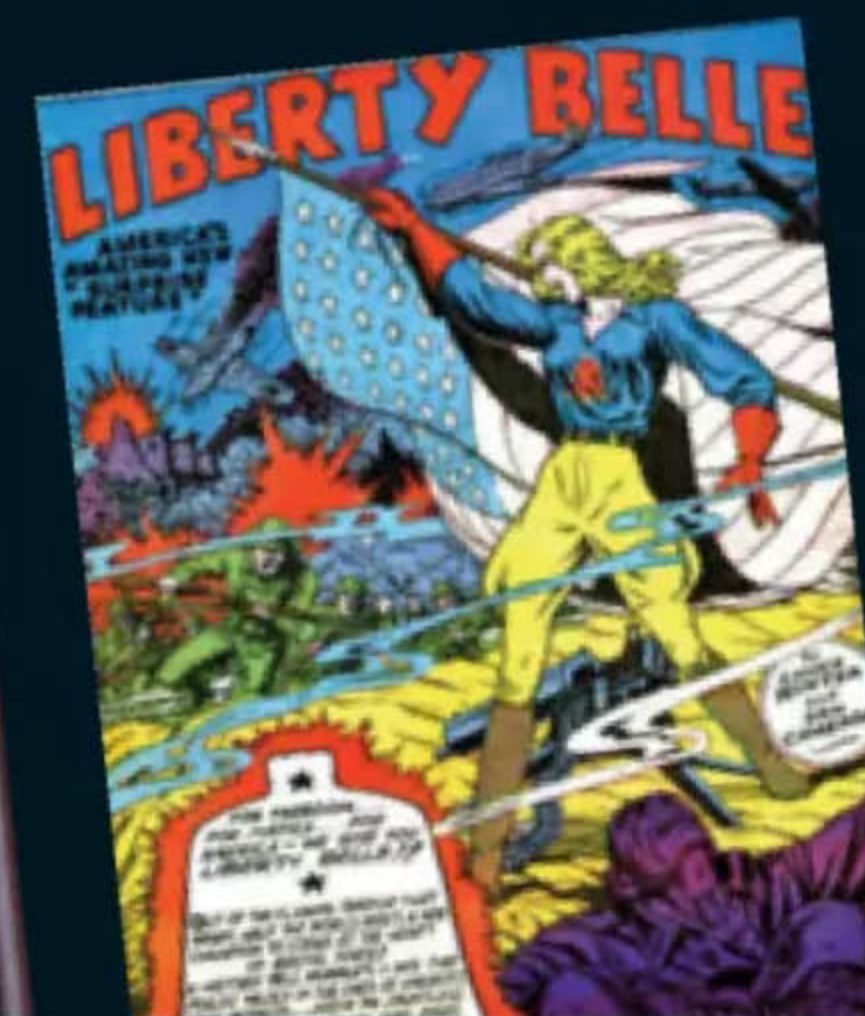


STAR SPANGLED KID

Kid hero Sylvester Pemberton took on the superhero mantle after Nazi sympathisers threatened to disrupt a 4 July celebration.

First Appearance: *Star Spangled Comics* #1

Patriot Points: Despite having no superpowers, the Star-Spangled Kid made it his duty to fight off fascism with the aid of his mechanic sidekick Stripsey. Plus, anyone willing to bear the weight of the moniker Star-Spangled Kid is probably due some props just for ridiculous patriotism.



LIBERTY BELLE

Like many Forties heroes, Libby Lawrence saw the horrors of Nazism first-hand when her father was killed in Poland. After a daring escape across the Channel, she assumed the alter-ego Liberty Belle as a tribute to the Liberty Bell.

First Appearance: *Boy Commandos* #1

Patriot Points: she shares a mystical connection with the famous Liberty Bell itself, gaining super-strength and other powers whenever the bell is rung.

they had used WWII plots. The most extreme example was Quality Comics' *T-Man*, which followed the thrilling exploits of a US Treasury agent (it managed to last from 1951 to 1956). When Captain America returned in the 1954 to do battle with communism, readers no longer appeared willing to accept blind devotion to nationalism. During the McCarthy years, patriotism was co-opted by jingoistic zeal, so when Captain America decided to wage war on communists, comic fans were unimpressed; his books sold poorly, and the run was cancelled. That same year, Kirby and Simon went hunting for reds under the bed with Prize Comics' *Fighting American*. Though their title took a swerve into the satirical and the ridiculous, he lasted only seven issues. It seemed that even the fathers of the form couldn't make flag-clad superheroes cool anymore.

Jump forward to 22 July 2011. A flash of red, white and blue bounds across the screen, and a familiar round shield glints in the light. *Captain America: The First Avenger* opens and grosses over \$65 million in the first weekend. His path back into the consciousness not only of comic fans, but of the wider world audience, led to two solo-

title movies and juicy parts in the *Avengers Assemble* franchise.

How did Captain America manage to avoid obscurity when so many other patriot-themed heroes failed?

A cynical view is that the nation's ego would be soothed by the re-emergence of a hero who confirms its own goodness and superiority. But is that fair? Certainly on first appearance, Captain America seems little more than the embodiment of a country's pride: after all, he does dress in a deconstructed American flag, and his name misses subtlety by a wide margin, while his devotion to the military and American ideals only confirm this. Nostalgia surely played some part in Cap's popularity, too; who wouldn't like to curl up with a childhood hero who echoed the supposedly 'easy' moral choices of the past?

But Cap's third coming also coincided with a nation fractured and no longer united by a common outside enemy. "When he comes back he is much more consumed with the internal divisions within the United States than in foreign intervention," notes Mark White, professor and author of *The Virtues Of Captain America: Modern-Day*

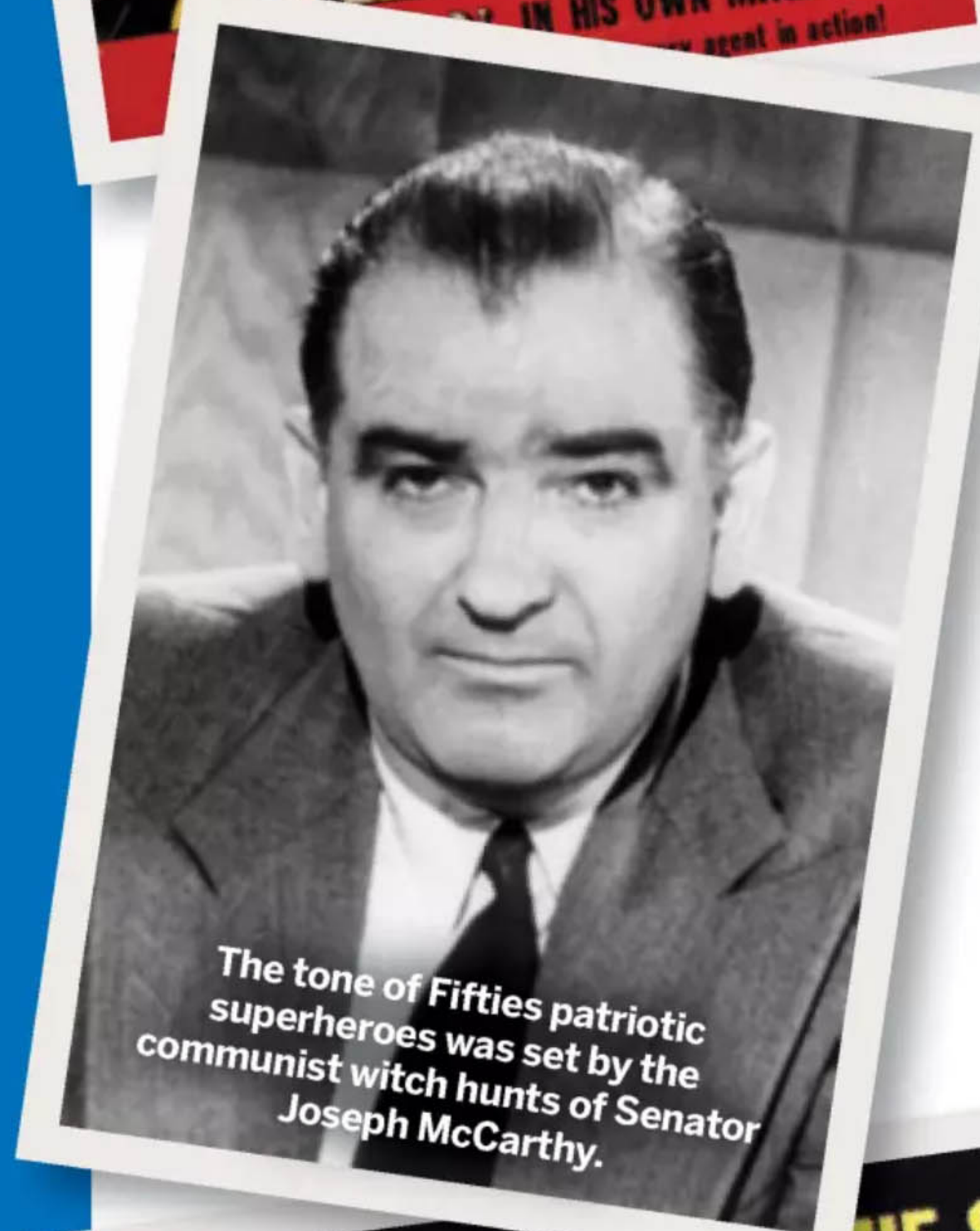
Lessons On Character From A World War II Superhero. "He still believes in the system – it's the people in the system that often let the country down." While in the past Rogers embodied everything America thought of itself, now he took on the spirit of an America less certain of its own superiority, but still sure that the founding principles of liberty, truth and equality were the best the country had to offer.

"His patriotism is a very cosmopolitan patriotism, and he not only holds his own government to those ideals, but also demands that they be extended to people of every nation. He may have learned those ideals as an American, but he applies them universally throughout the world," continues White.

White explains his own view of Cap's longevity. "Two reasons, one perhaps more realistic and the other which I prefer," he laughs. "The first is that Cap had the better writers and stories, and he had the marketing might of the Marvel Comics machine – also known as Stan Lee – behind ➤

Miss America was another popular all-American superhero





The tone of Fifties patriotic superheroes was set by the communist witch hunts of Senator Joseph McCarthy.



➤ him.” His other explanation lies in the core values of Cap’s character: “Not just ‘political’ values like justice and equality, but also personal virtues like honesty and courage, which people still regard as important and to which they still aspire today.”

Cap’s new adventures began in 1964, although first Marvel had to undo the unfortunate ‘commie-smashing’ era of the fifties. Luckily, comics continuity can be over-written by anything from Skrull replacements to simply ignoring stories, and Cap’s actions were waved away as the scheme of an imposter. In a narrative conceit particularly suited to comic-books, it was revealed that at the very end of World War II, Captain America had actually been frozen beneath the ice during a WWII mission that also apparently claimed sidekick Bucky’s life. Thanks to the super-serum, Cap spent the next 20 years living the life of a popsicle. It was a neat trick on the part of Marvel writers: by the time Cap was thawed out, the politics and ideologies that had shaped both him and America had changed. Rather than updating his origin story or simply waving

away his dated roots, the writers embraced his archaic, almost quaint worldview. Just as the world between the pages had moved on without Captain America, the comic-buying public had passed the character by. He emerged to worlds real and fictional as a relic of past ideals.

“He was reintroduced to a world when the ‘good guys’ weren’t always good and the ‘bad guys’ weren’t ambiguously bad. He still adhered to his core principles of right and wrong, but discovered that applying those principles wasn’t as easy as it seemed to be in the Forties – and, in fact, it had never been as easy as he thought,” says White. Dittmer also points out that “the overarching story of Captain America since 1963 has been a ‘man out of time’, struggling to accommodate himself to the ‘new’ America in which he finds himself.”

This ‘new’ America provided Cap with lots of conflict. In a fictionalised account of Watergate, Cap faced his biggest encounter with government corruption in his beloved country. Rather than blindly supporting those in power, Cap reacted by throwing off his title as a sign of his disillusionment

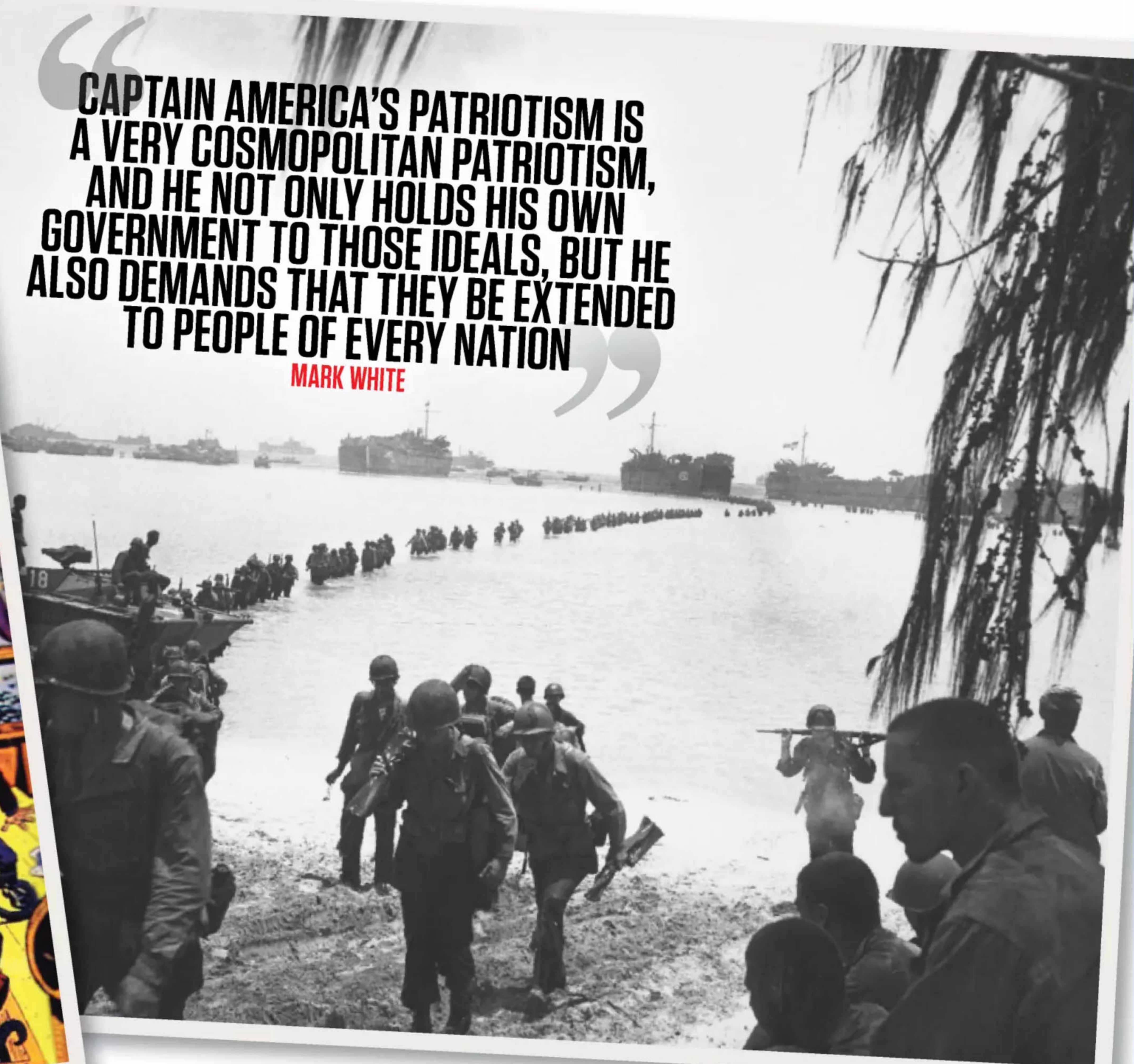
and taking on another: Nomad – the hero without a country – rose up in his place for a few years.

Social change became a mine for stories, too. Race and gender issues came to the forefront, and the comics industry had to make sure they weren’t left behind. Although the African-born Black Panther appeared in 1966, *Captain America* #117 – published in 1969, the year after Civil Rights leader Martin Luther King was shot – saw the first African-American superhero in the Falcon. He and Cap became partners, eventually sharing the cover and title from 1971 until 1978. Rather than ignoring prejudice through Cap’s own innate sense of equality, they used it to explore the theme, according to Dittmer: “They turn his colour-blindness against him. The Falcon has to teach him to see the racism at the heart of American culture, because Captain America just doesn’t notice it.”

The most striking real-world story was 11 September 2001. Seen as an assault on the US itself, it would have been awkward had Captain America not dealt with the terrorist attacks in some way. White sums up Cap’s

CAPTAIN AMERICA’S PATRIOTISM IS A VERY COSMOPOLITAN PATRIOTISM, AND HE NOT ONLY HOLDS HIS OWN GOVERNMENT TO THOSE IDEALS, BUT HE ALSO DEMANDS THAT THEY BE EXTENDED TO PEOPLE OF EVERY NATION

MARK WHITE





CAN YOU DIG IT?

Andy Diggie talks about writing *Captain America: Living Legend*



On Captain America's character:

Simple decency and rugged self-reliance pretty much sums it up. I'd say he has much in common with Superman – that sense of humble, good old-fashioned decency.

On what Captain America represents:

The notion of fairness, the idea that anyone can succeed if they work hard and play fair, goes right to the heart of the American Dream, and I think Cap embodies that. The

fact that he was just an ordinary Joe who signed up, and ended up becoming this paragon. True or not, I think that's how America likes to see itself.

On writing Captain America:

I have a problem with jingoistic nationalism, from whatever country, and I was aware that could be a problem. That's one of the reasons I cooked up a story where "My country, right or wrong" wouldn't be an issue.

On American politics:

I deliberately avoided them. If you want to write a story about the nature of American nationalism, a comic called *Captain America* probably isn't the best place to do it – not without pissing off the fan base, at least.

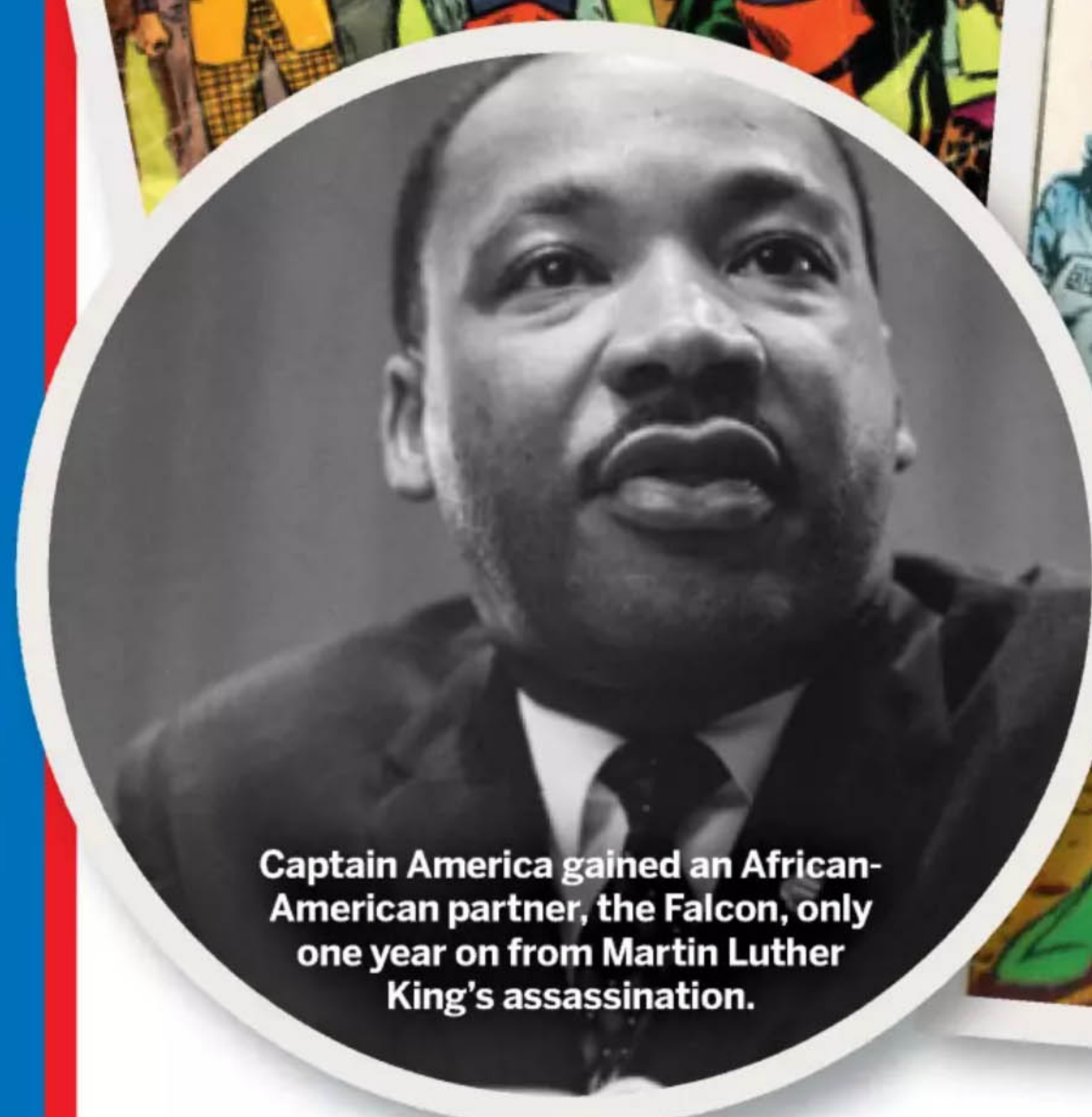
On the reasons for Cap's continued success:

Jack and Stan.

On the role of nostalgia:

The 'man out of time' aspect has been central to the character since his 'rebirth' in the Sixties, so nostalgia is an inherent part of what makes him tick – more so than most other decades-old characters. I tried to reflect that in the story itself, in the flashbacks sections, rather than have it be something he dwells on himself.

Captain America: Living Legend is ongoing from Marvel Comics. Pick it up from all good comic stores or digitally via the Comixology app.



Captain America gained an African-American partner, the Falcon, only one year on from Martin Luther King's assassination.



➤ approach to the events: "His attitude was both responsive and responsible, promising to take the fight to the enemy, but being very careful to know who that enemy was... he prevented a grieving man from attacking a random Middle Eastern man on the street, telling him 'he's not the enemy.'"

Post 9/11, Captain America found himself balanced uneasily between pro and anti-war factions, unwilling to be claimed by either one. "9/11 and the War on Terror was tricky," says Dittmer. "They tried to engage with the context of Islamic terrorism without resorting to anti-Islamic caricatures, and they tried to 'balance' it by talking about how it was blowback for American foreign policy."

During the war in Afghanistan, the motives behind American participation were questioned vigorously, in contrast with the mostly pro-action consensus for World War II. Marvel took those themes and created the acclaimed *Civil War* arc, which pitted Iron Man and Captain America against each other over the Superhuman Registration Act, a thinly veiled allusion to the Patriot Act. Once again, Cap showed that he was no tool of the status quo, mounting an opposition to this threat to liberty, which ultimately led to his murder. Whether the death is seen as symbolic of the death of American ideals or of patriotic identity, the story is a powerful

one, and news of his demise was picked up by the mainstream press. In true comic-book style, however, Cap came back right when the world needed him most, and since then has continued to apply his high ideals to a flawed world.

According to Dittmer, "The trick for the writers is to keep Captain America in touch with contemporary values while nevertheless making it seem like he never changes. In truth, this is the challenge of the nation-state – pretending there is some fundamental essence that links all these people and things together throughout time." In other words, what keeps Captain America relevant is tied in with America's own changing ideas of itself as a country and an identity. Backed by a multi-million dollar publishing company and a sense of nostalgic regret, Captain America couldn't help but find renewed success, and yet ultimately he has endured simply because he has managed to encapsulate America – flaws and all – for the world. As long as the American dream has a hold on popular culture, Cap isn't going anywhere. ☺

Many of the comics mentioned here are available digitally from Comixology or Marvel Unlimited, and we urge you to check them out!



RAT QUEENS: SASS AND SORCERY

Details Originally published Rat Queens #1-5 (2013-14) **Publisher** Image **Writer** Kurtis J Wiebe **Artist** Roc Upchurch
Collected in Rat Queens: Vol 1 - Sass And Sorcery **Available digitally** Comixology, Image Comics Digital Store

It's rare to find a comic where the main characters are women with varied personalities and body types who are portrayed without a hint of objectification.

It centres on the exploits of the Rat Queens, an adventuring company of four friends: Dee, the introverted atheist human cleric; Hannah, the sarcastic rockabilly elven mage; Violet, the dwarven warrior trying to distance herself from her heritage; and Betty, the sweet halfling thief with a penchant for candy and drugs. Whether they're slaughtering monsters or recovering from hangovers, their personalities and relationships shine through, making them easy to identify with and love.

The clear influence of *Dungeons & Dragons* on *Rat Queens* combines two areas of stereotypically male geek culture – comics and RPGs – and makes them female-orientated. This inclusivity sends the message that *Rat Queens*, comics and geekdom as a whole really are for everybody.

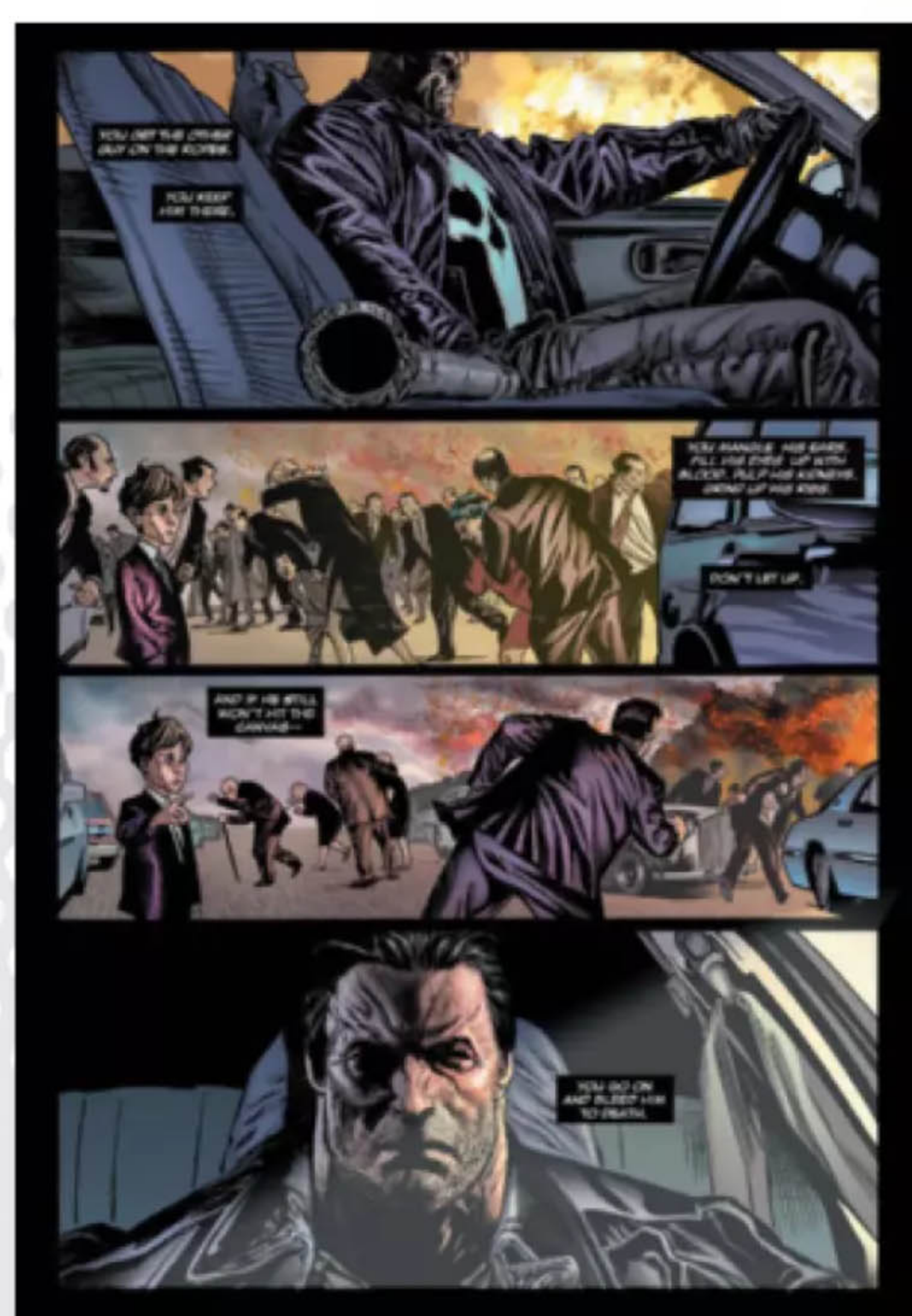


THE PUNISHER MAX: IN THE BEGINNING

Details Originally published *The Punisher MAX*: #1-6 (2004) **Publisher** Marvel **Writer** Garth Ennis **Artist** Lewis Larosa
Collected in *The Punisher Vol 1: In The Beginning* **Available digitally** Comixology, Marvel Unlimited

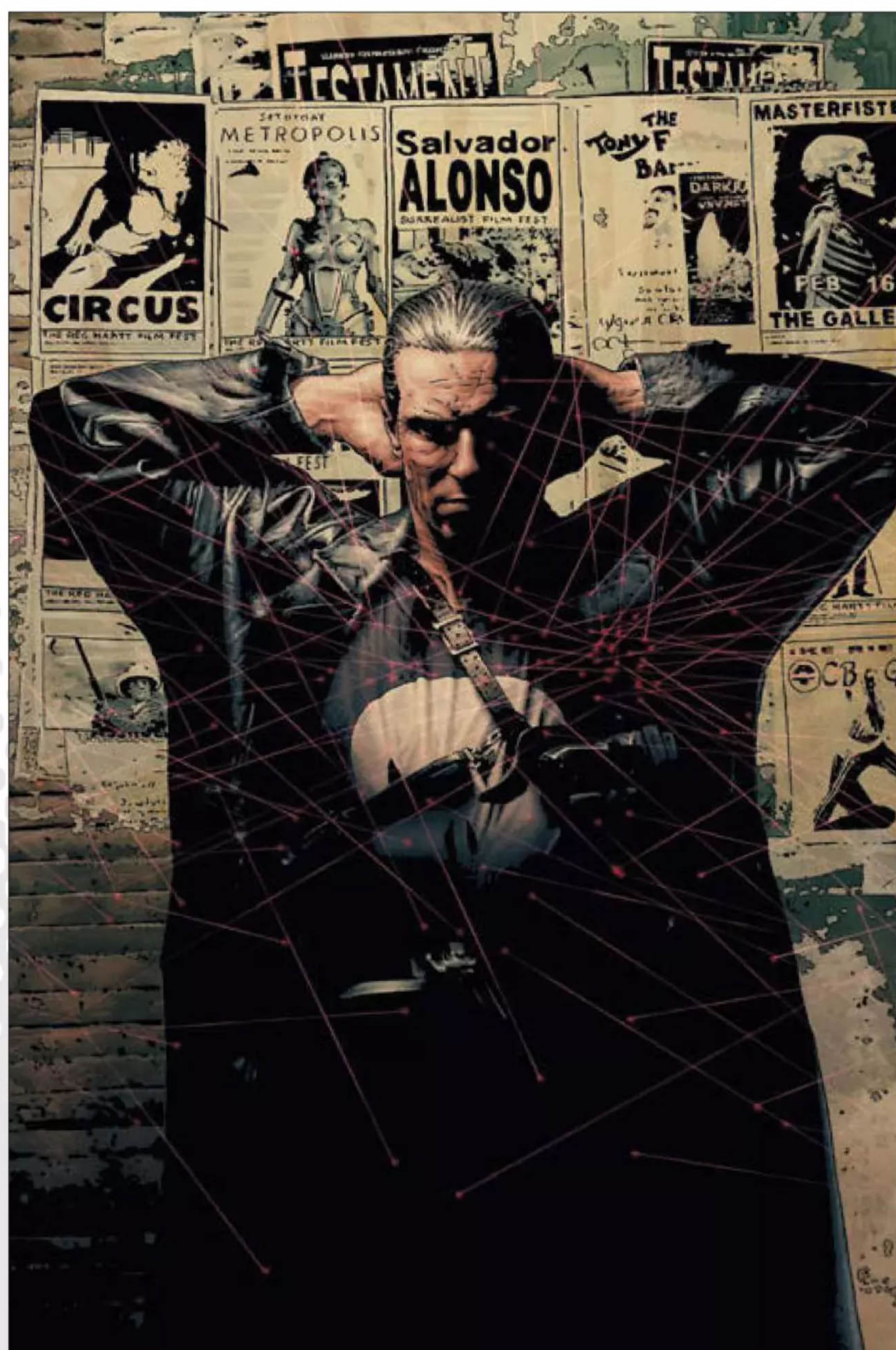
The Punisher always struggled to fit into the traditional Marvel Universe. And so he should have; he's a gun-toting maniac in a city full of superpowered heroes and villains. That's why the mature MAX line led by writer Garth Ennis was so damned successful.

A much older Frank Castle finds himself in a realistic world



without superheroes lurking in the skies to clean up his mess, a world where the villains are drug dealers, corrupt politicians and sex traffickers. *The Punisher MAX* is a deliciously violent and unflinching introspective look at a character that's emotionally crippled by his one-man war on crime. The spandex suit and ridiculous sidekicks are replaced by an insatiable blood lust against the crime that runs rampant through New York City.

The Punisher MAX is a blood-soaked thriller that reveals Frank's journey didn't start with three gunshots in a park, but a lifelong desire to punish the wretched.



FUN HOME: A FAMILY TRAGICOMIC

Details Originally published *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* (2006)
Publisher Jonathan Cape **Writer** Alison Bechdel **Artist** Alison Bechdel
Collected in *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* **Available digitally** N/A

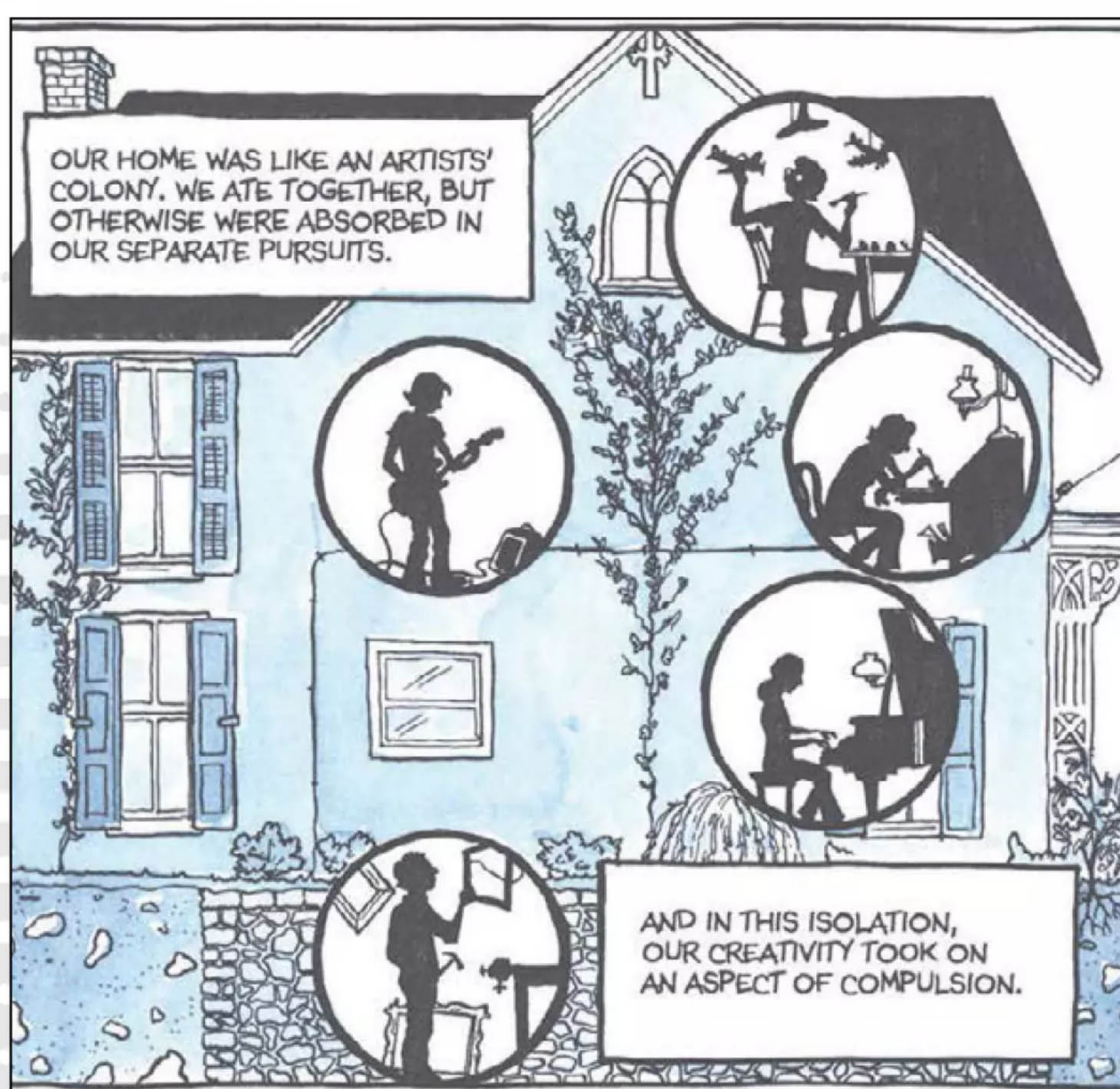
Alison Bechdel, famed for the creation of the Bechdel Test within the pages of her acclaimed *Dykes To Watch Out For* strip, hit the critical jackpot with her first graphic memoir, *Fun Home*. Focusing on her childhood and relationship with her father, this title has a real love of literature which has greatly widened the memoirs appeal.

A seven-year labour of love, Bechdel explores various themes as they affect her and her family: sexual orientation and gender roles are of particular importance, but the book also touches on complexities of family life and the sensitive subject of suicide.

Beautifully drawn scenes are replayed again and again with deeper layers of meaning – the recursion of the non-linear narrative is always clever rather than grating, as Bechdel struggles to come to terms with her own sexual identity alongside revelations about her father. Infamous in the US for attempted bannings due to the gay and sexual content, *Fun Home* is fast becoming a modern classic nonetheless.

**"FAST BECOMING
A MODERN
CLASSIC"**

ON BECHDEL



MARK WAID • ALEX ROSS

Greatest Comics

ABSOLUTE KINGDOM COME



KINGDOM COME

Details Originally published Kingdom Come #1-4 (1996) **Publisher** DC **Writer** Mark Waid
Artist Alex Ross **Collected in** Kingdom Come (£8.99) **Available digitally** Comixology

Kingdom Come is a symbolic struggle between idealism and darkness, rendered in beautiful photorealism. In this Elseworlds story, Superman, Wonder Woman and the rest of the old guard are pitted against a new, more violent breed of superheroes; meanwhile, Captain Marvel has been brainwashed into evil by Lex Luthor.

It's a clear break with the popular trend of grim 'n' gritty comics, emphasised by the callback to *The Dark Knight Returns* with a reclusive, grey-haired Batman and corporate giant Luthor's role in turning a symbol of cheerful bravery into a killer. Even today, look at the body count, dismemberment and cut-off faces of the New 52; Superman killing Zod in *Man Of Steel* or the stoney-faced solemnity of Christopher Nolan's film trilogy.

Mark Waid and Alex Ross's story of the triumph of optimism over grimness is no less significant than it was in 1996. We may want blood, but we need hope.







THE AMAZING WORLDS OF ALEX ROSS

We present a gallery of the legendary Kingdom Come artist's best work from his new deluxe hardcover book, *The Dynamite Art Of Alex Ross*

It's no exaggeration to say that **Alex Ross's painted artwork has raised the credibility of the visual storytelling medium.** With rich, lifelike illustrations and having perfected an uncanny ability to capture the majesty of pop culture icons in almost biblical fashion, his portrait work offers a visual experience than no other artist has ever, and may never, even come close to matching.

Ross is best known for his work on DC Comics' superb miniseries *Kingdom Come* and *Justice*, Marvel Comics' stirring *Marvels*, and covers for Kurt Busiek's ongoing *Astro City* series, but has

balanced his career between cover paintings and even satirical works. His cover of *The Village Voice*, which depicted George W Bush sucking the blood of the Statue Of Liberty, attracted a strong amount of media attention, reaffirming the impact that his paintings can have. With fast-rising indie Dynamite Entertainment, Ross has contributed covers, redesigned universes and bolstered classic sci-fi properties with his bold artwork. Frankly, we're in love with his work – he truly is the best at what he does. You can find out more about his art at www.alexrossart.com.

Greatest Comics



Dynamite's *Red Sonja* comic launched in 2005 with multiple variant covers, and Ross brought a palpable rage to the fierce warrior of Robert E Howard's fantasy world.





Ross revived Thirties hero The Phantom – also known as the Ghost Who Walks – with reverence to the book's source material, as he updated the design for a modern audience.



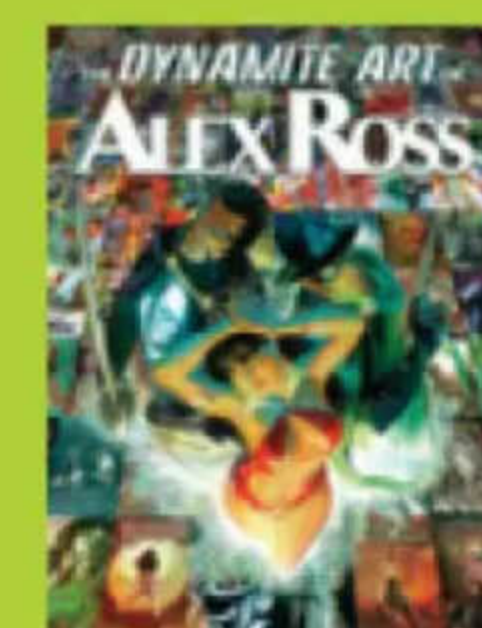
Project Superpowers saw Ross restoring many forgotten Golden Age figures into an epic international drama, with the series eventually receiving several spin-off titles.



Though the series itself wasn't up to scratch, Ross made Marvel's *Invaders Now!* look like both a superb team book and an entertaining, pulpy adventure.



THE DYNAMITE ART OF ALEX ROSS



The Dynamite Art Of Alex Ross is available for \$39.99. Find out more information or order your copy at Dynamite.net.



For the adaptation of Kevin Smith's unused *Green Hornet* movie script, Ross recaptured the cinematic quality of the classic comic-book superhero.



Kirby: Genesis was the result of Dynamite picking up a number of the more obscure Jack Kirby properties, and merging them into an epic shared universe that pays tribute to the late master of cosmic superheroics.



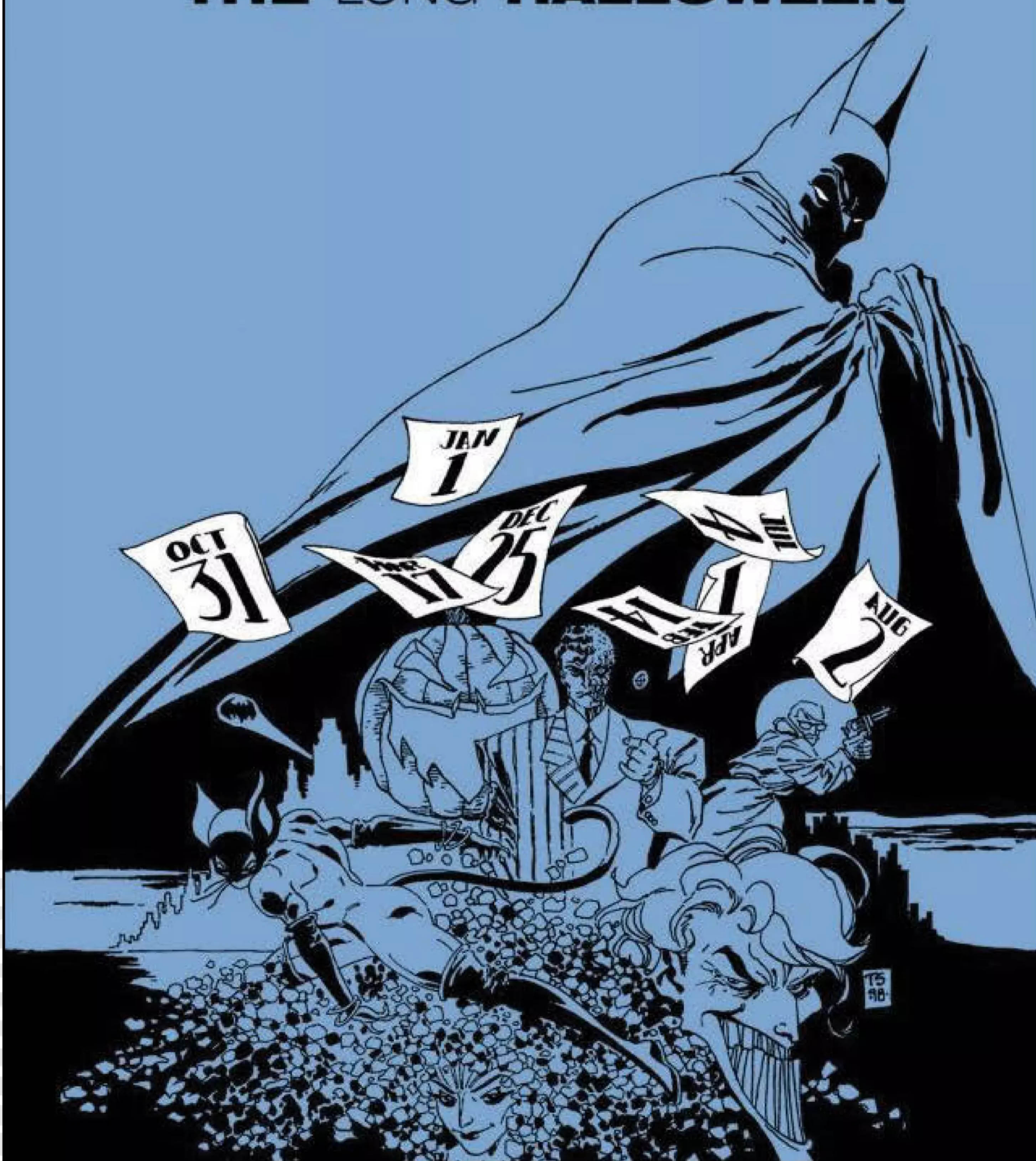
Greatest Comics

From the Eisner Award-winning creators

JEPH **L O E B** TIM **S A L E**

BATMAN

THE LONG **HALLOWEEN**



BATMAN: THE LONG HALLOWEEN

Details Originally published *Batman: The Long Halloween* #1-13 (1996-97) **Publisher** DC **Writer** Jeph Loeb
Artist Tim Sale **Collected in** *Absolute Batman: The Long Halloween* **Available digitally** TBC

Retelling an origin story can be a tricky business, but Jeph Loeb and Tim Sale's *Batman: The Long Halloween* filters Harvey Dent's transformation through classic gangster movies and hard-boiled murder mysteries to create Two-Face's finest tale.

With a killer picking off Gotham's many mobsters, Dent, Batman and Jim Gordon race to find the man (or woman) responsible before a gang war begins. The story is so deeply steeped in *The Godfather* (Carmine Falcone is essentially a skinnier Don Corleone who has to deal with comic-book villains) and James Cagney-style tough guys that *The Long Halloween* veers towards pastiche, but Sale's artwork beautifully renders Gotham as a gloriously Thirties gangland Chicago.

It's not all about the gangsters, though. Sale's Joker is a fantastically toothy, wiry creation, and Loeb never loses sight of the fact that is a *Batman* story. Finally, it's the slow destruction of the central trio that makes *The Long Halloween* so powerful, as Christopher Nolan understood when he borrowed it for *The Dark Knight*. Loeb and Sale make us believe in Harvey Dent – and then they break him.



PERSEPOLIS

Details Originally published *Persepolis: The Story Of A Childhood* (2003); *Persepolis: The Story Of A Return* (2004) **Publisher** L'Association (France)/Jonathan Cape (UK)/Pantheon Books (US) **Writer** Marjane Satrapi **Artist** Marjane Satrapi **Collected in** *Persepolis I and II* **Available digitally** Random House

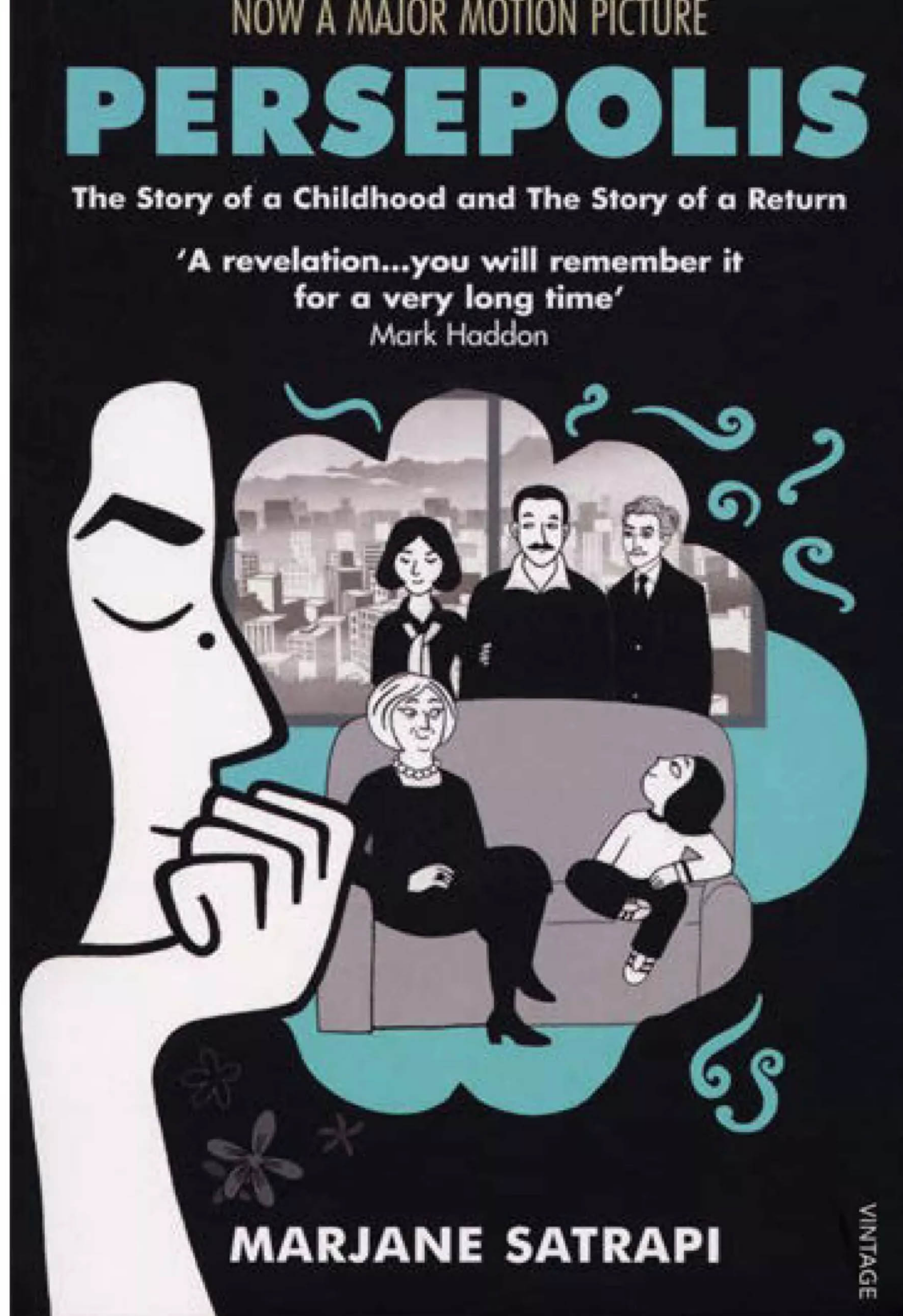
Writer and artist Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* is one of the definitive examples of the graphic memoir format.

Satrapi applies her irrepressible voice and richly expressive art style to her experiences of growing up in Iran during the Islamic Revolution, living in Vienna, and returning to her homeland, with romance, sex, divorce and discovery along the way.

Along with her strong-minded mother and grandmother, Satrapi is a dissenter and independent thinker from a young age, defying the stereotype of Muslim women as subservient or repressed.

Persepolis's take on how the political affects the personal is heartbreaking – women almost coming to blows over groceries during a food shortage – and hilarious: young Marjane claiming a photo of Michael Jackson on her jacket depicts Malcolm X, or a drawing class where female subjects wear head-to-toe veils.

It's an honest, complex, painful and beautiful book that deserves not just to be read, but to be treasured. Just as the cover reviews states, it will be a read that stays with you long after you turn over the last page.



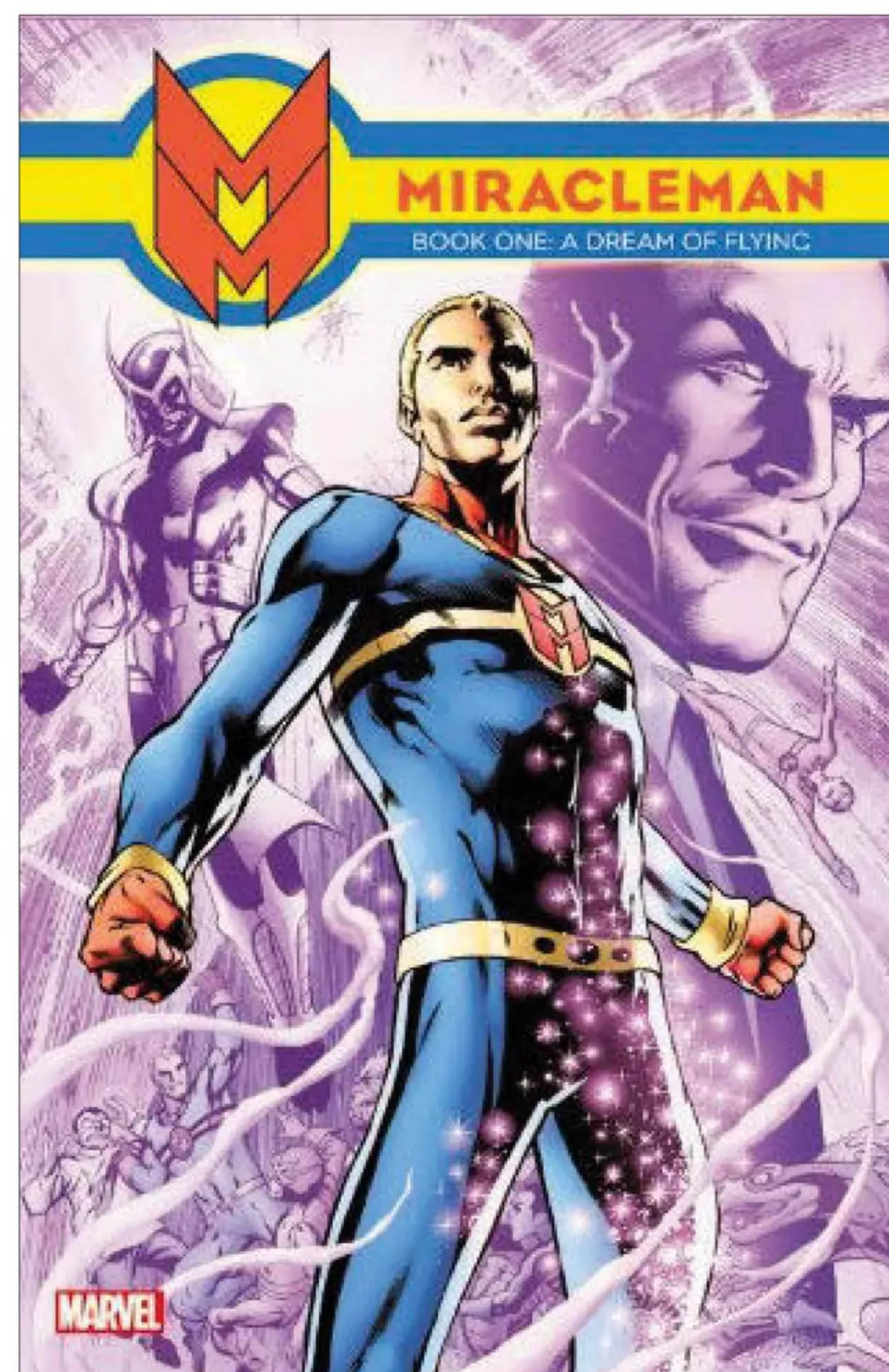
MIRACLEMAN

Details Originally published *Warrior* #1-21 (1982) **Publisher** L Miller & Son **Writer** Alan Moore **Artist** Garry Leach
Collected in *Minuteman: Vol 1 – A Dream Of Flying* **Available digitally** Comixology, Marvel, Digital Unlimited

After Alan Moore took on the *Marvelman* reboot in 1982, he characteristically took the hero in a much darker direction, changing the name to *Miracleman* in 1985 due to Marvel taking issue with the original name. It was Moore's first fumbling with superhero fiction – and in it, you

can see him touch upon themes that would later come to define his work in comics: from the superhero as a source of disquiet and Byronic villains to the deconstruction of superhero fiction.

It's worth reading Moore's run on *Miracleman* in order to understand Britain's overall place in the comics world, and see how Moore took a semi-legal hero (Miracleman began life as a Captain Marvel rip-off) and define him with his own dark fantasies in an age of Thatcher-lead political tension, nuclear paranoia and punk-rock mentality. Moore's take on Mike Moran spoke to the people of Britain in a way comics had never done before – an important and seminal step in Britain's blossoming comic scene.



LONE WOLF AND CUB

VOLUME 1
THE ASSASSIN'S ROAD

By KAZUO KOIKE
& GOSEKI KOJIMA



LONE WOLF AND CUB

Details Originally published *Lone Wolf And Cub* (1970) **Publisher** Dark Horse **Writer** Kazuo Koike **Artist** Goseki Kojima
Collected in *Lone Wolf And Cub: Vol 1 – The Assassin's Road* **Available digitally** Dark Horse

Lone Wolf And Cub isn't just a classic piece of comics storytelling; it's a classic story. After being framed, disgraced and having his wife murdered, Ogami Itto gives his young son a choice; a ball or a sword. If the child crawled towards the ball, he would have killed him so he could reunite with his mother. The child, Daigoro, crawled towards the sword, and in doing sent both of them down the long path of vengeance.

Lone Wolf And Cub is an epic, with the original series running to 28 volumes. The central image looks absurd, but is actually the entire series wrapped up in one image: a father and a son, duty and love, honour and vengeance. Tragic, complex, action-packed and character-driven, it's astonishing, bloody and brilliant stuff. If you're interested in manga or the classics of modern comics then you must read this.



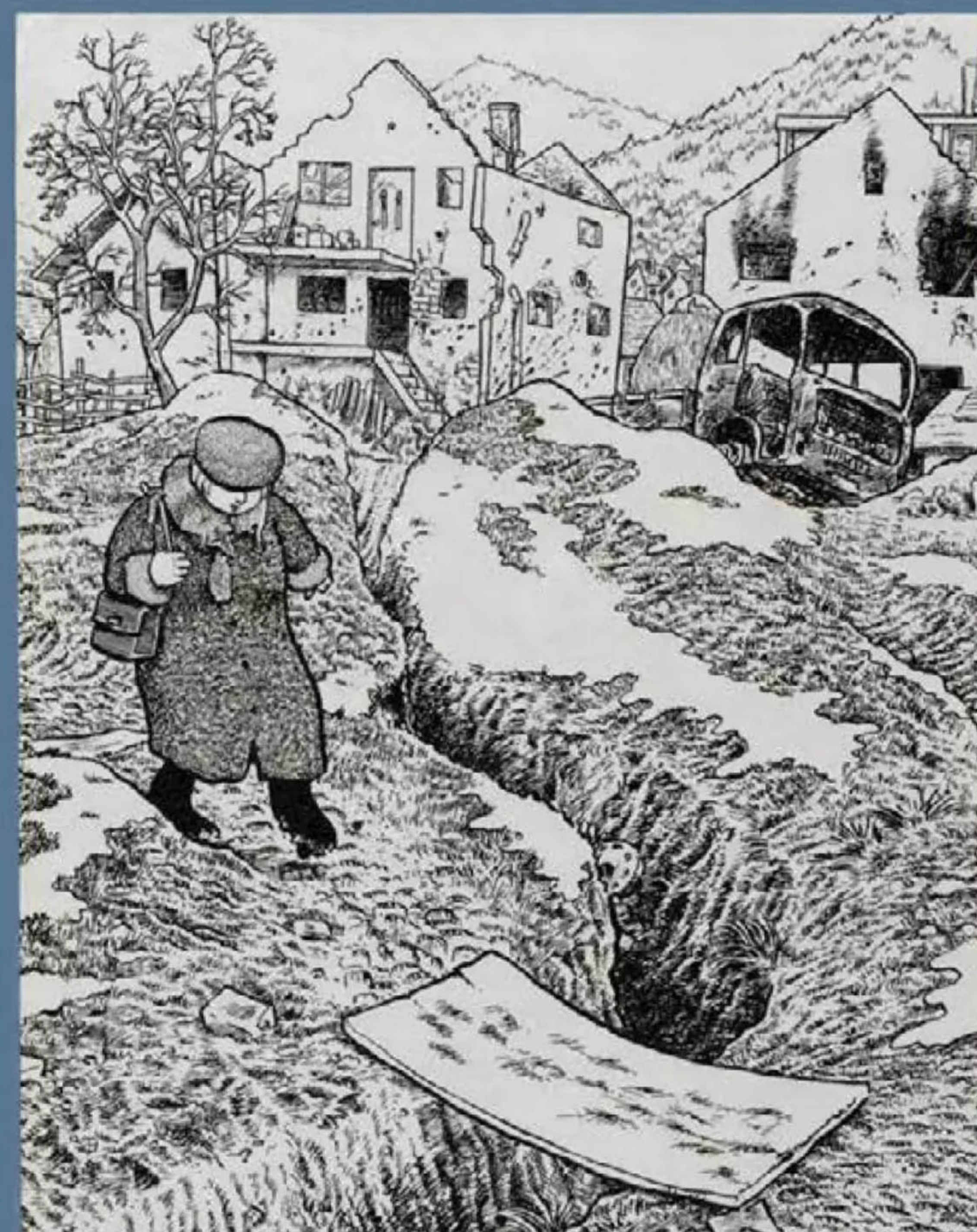
SAFE AREA GORAZDE: THE WAR IN EASTERN BOSNIA 1992-95

Details Originally published Safe Area Gorazde: The War in Eastern Bosnia 1992-95 (2000) **Publisher** Fantagraphics **Writer** Joe Sacco **Artist** Joe Sacco
Collected in Safe Area Gorazde: The Special Edition **Available digitally** N/A

Joe Sacco is by far the most critically acclaimed graphic journalist in the world today, with his many works focusing on Gaza garnering particular attention. Yet it is here, immersed within the Bosnian War of 1992-95, that Sacco delivers the best work of his career.

Intertwining the stories of those trapped within the enclave of Gorazde with his own observations, Sacco perfectly balances his New Journalist subjective approach with keeping the story centre stage. Contrasting the real story with the political machinations on the world stage, Sacco brings this terrible history to life in a way mere words struggle to bear.

The tipping point of neighbours turning upon one another in the name of nationalism and ethnic segregation is as relevant as ever, and this book remains essential reading for anyone hoping to understand the worst elements of human nature.



SAFE AREA GORAZDE

THE SPECIAL EDITION

Joe Sacco



BONE

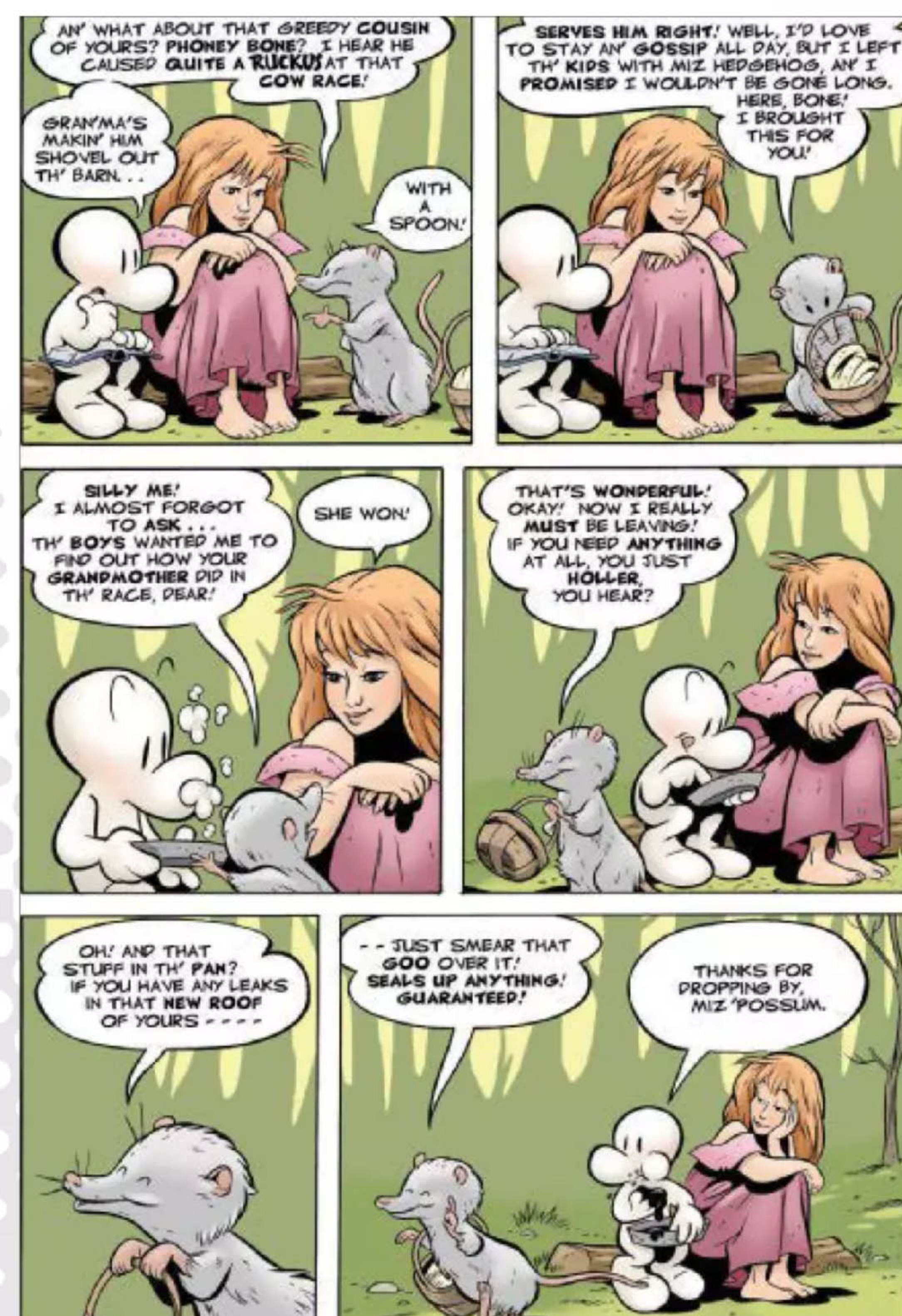
Details Originally published Bone #1-55 (1991-2004) **Publisher** Image
Writer Alison Bechdel **Artist** Jeff Smith **Collected in** Bone
Available digitally Comixology

Collected into a single volume, Jeff Smith's *Bone* series reveals itself as a true fantasy epic. There's the hero's journey, as Fone Bone and his friends Phoney and Smiley Bone realise that they must act to help save the Valley from The Hooded One and his rat creatures, there are the good-hearted folk who must be protected from the ever-growing forces of darkness, and there's even a dragon.

What makes *Bone* so special is Smith's refusal to be limited by the structure of the epic fantasy tale. His fantastic sense of humour seems both out of place and yet completely perfect, as Phoney Bone's schemes consistently go awry. It's unclear where exactly this story is taking place or when, but his gift for balancing character and humanity with this increasingly grand tale keeps us invested throughout.

The character design, too, feels completely unique, and works in tandem with Fone Bone's essential innocence and good nature to create a savvy but utterly lovable tale.

**"A SAVVY BUT
UTTERLY
LOVABLE TALE"**



ASTONISHING **X-MEN** WHEDON • CASSADAY



ASTONISHING X-MEN: GIFTED

Details Originally published Astonishing X-Men #1-#6 (2004) **Publisher** Marvel **Writer** Joss Whedon
Artist John Cassaday **Collected in** Astonishing X-Men: Vol - Gifted **Available digitally** Comixology

Surely just the words 'Joss Whedon wrote an X-Men arc' are enough to convince anyone of this series' merits without any need for further elaboration?

Just in case you need further convincing, John Cassaday's art is perfect, Whedon's dialogue is witty and heartfelt, and the team he assembles (Cyclops, Wolverine, Beast, Kitty Pryde and Emma Frost) are beautifully balanced. This is the series that both launched Kitty into the major character she is now and brought Colossus back. Whedon even made Cyclops lovable, for crying out loud.

The *Gifted* arc focuses on the creation of a mutant cure brought about by mutant experimentation. The series goes on to introduce now-familiar elements like SWORD (and Abigail Brand), the Breakworld, Kavita Rao, Danger and Armor.

There's also a whole issue where a psychic attack causes Wolverine to revert to childhood, just in case you're still in need of persuasion.



THE AIRTIGHT GARAGE

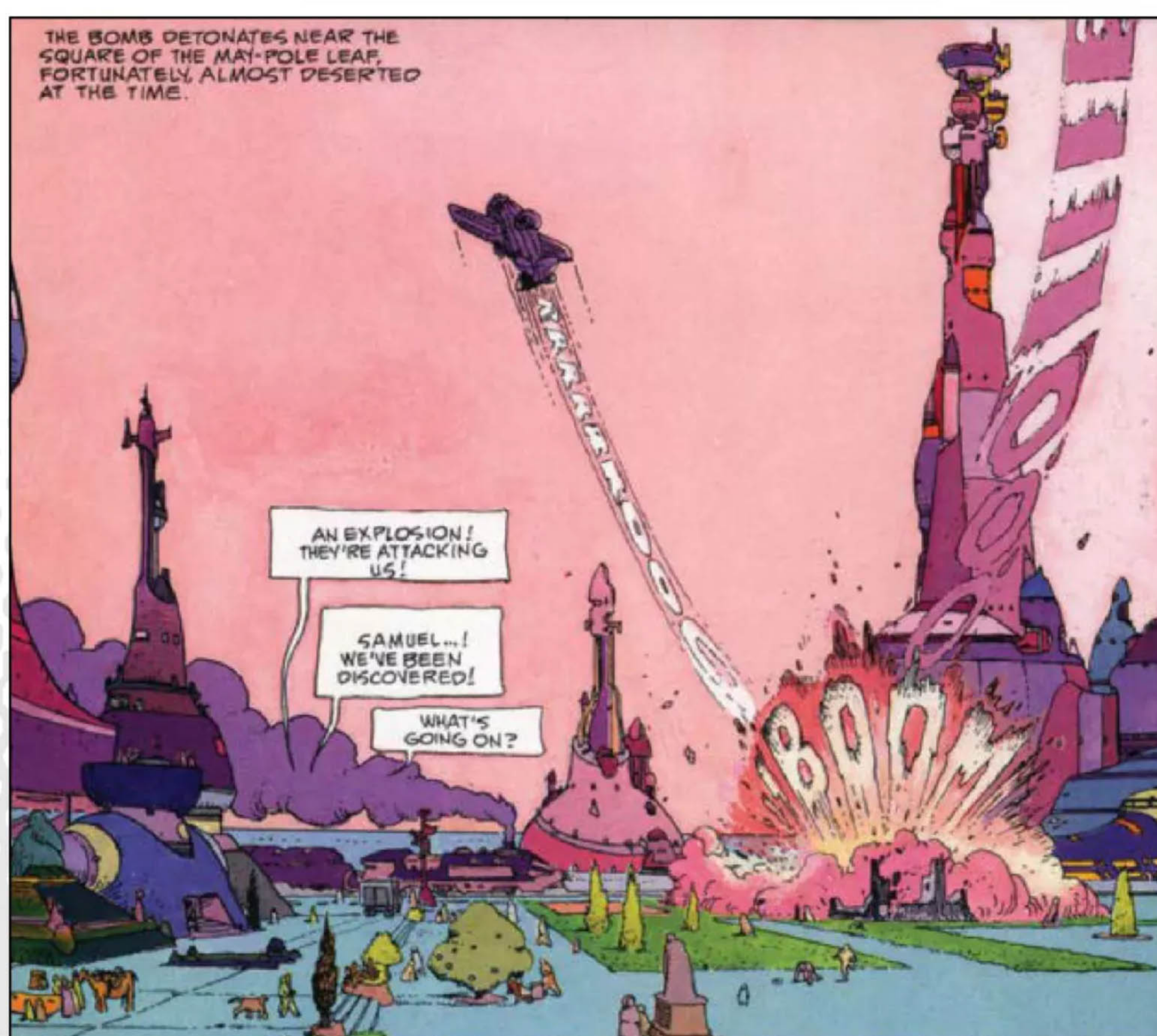
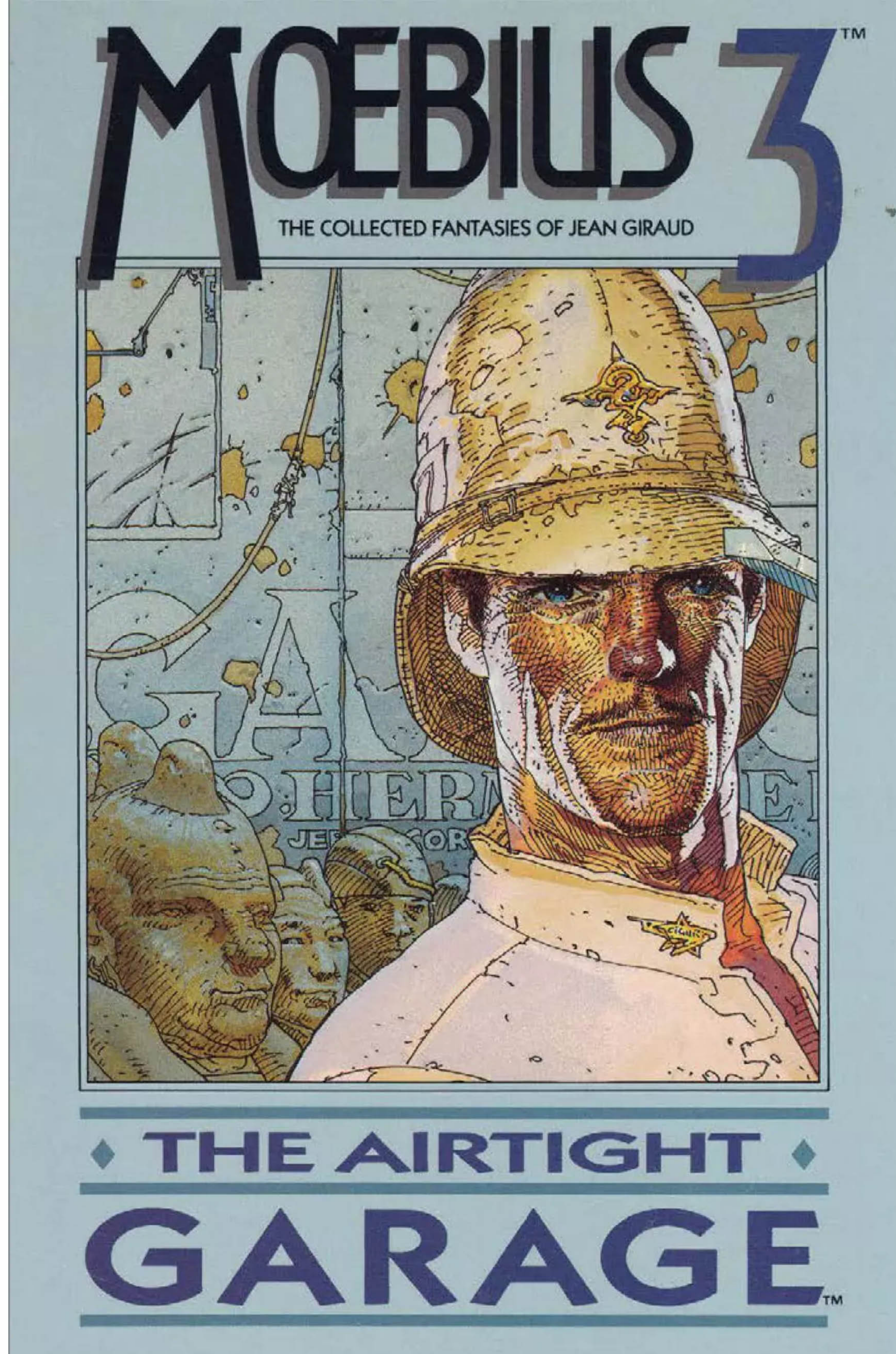
Details Originally published Le Garage Hermétique de Jerry Cornelius (1976-79)
Publisher Marvel, Titan **Writer** Moebius **Artist** Moebius **Collected in** Moebius 3:
 The Airtight Garage **Available digitally** N/A

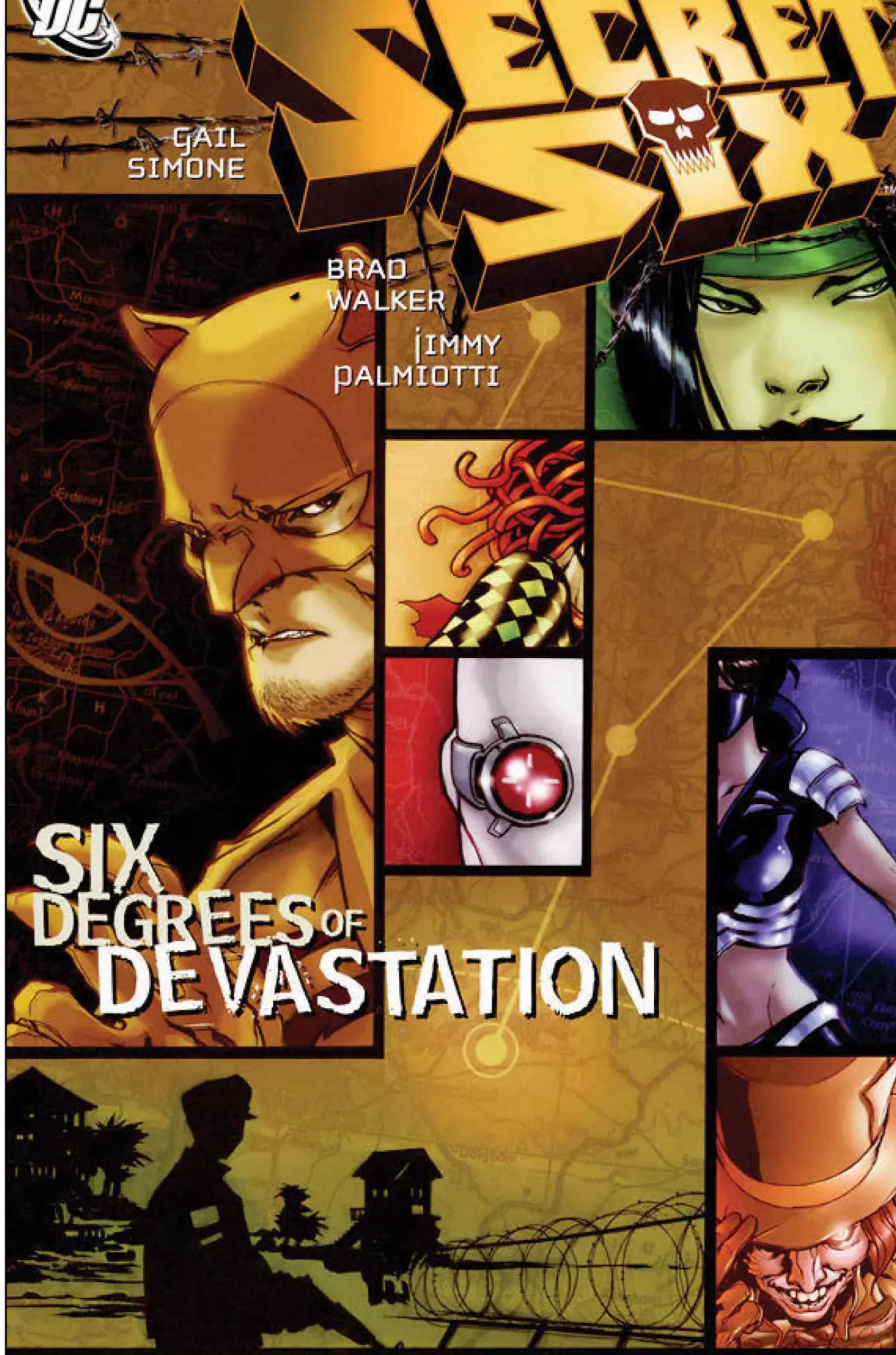
Jean Giraud, better known as Moebius, is quite possibly one of the most important comic creators of all time, influencing fellow legends like Stan Lee, Neil Gaiman, Frank Quitely and Hayao Miyazaki. His older work is bizarrely hard to get a hold of in English, although his famous silent work *Arzach* requires no knowledge of French to enjoy.

The Airtight Garage, originally translated by Marvel Comics in 1987, is a whimsical – and largely improvised – sci-fi story. An asteroid, the garage of the title, houses a pocket universe orbited by Major Grubert in his spaceship as others try to break into the garage and the worlds that lie within.

A stunning work, originally published in black and white and later imbued with pop-tastic colours, this is hailed as Moebius' masterpiece: a living, breathing comic that gracefully unfolds across the pages.

For any fan of science fiction, this is a must-read – behold the imagination that gave birth to the concept designs Moebius contributed to *Alien*, *Tron* and *The Fifth Element*. Fans owe him a lot, and his artwork is simply divine.





SECRET SIX: SIX DEGREES OF DEVASTATION

Details Originally published Secret Six #1-6 (2008) **Publisher** DC **Writer** Gail Simone **Artist** Brad Walker **Collected in** Secret Six: Six Degrees of Devastation **Available digitally** Comixology

It's really no surprise when Gail Simone takes an unloved character and makes them awesome – that's basically her stock-in-trade. But she turned it into high art with *Secret Six*, a band of misfits (who often don't actually number six) who don't necessarily want to be evil, but suck at being good.

Six Degrees Of Devastation is the second *Secret Six* miniseries (after *Villains United*), and it was followed by an ongoing series. But *Devastation* was when the series hit its hilarious, weird and surprisingly violent stride. The arc focuses on Scandal Savage's somewhat difficult relationship with her father, but that won't be what stays with you afterwards.

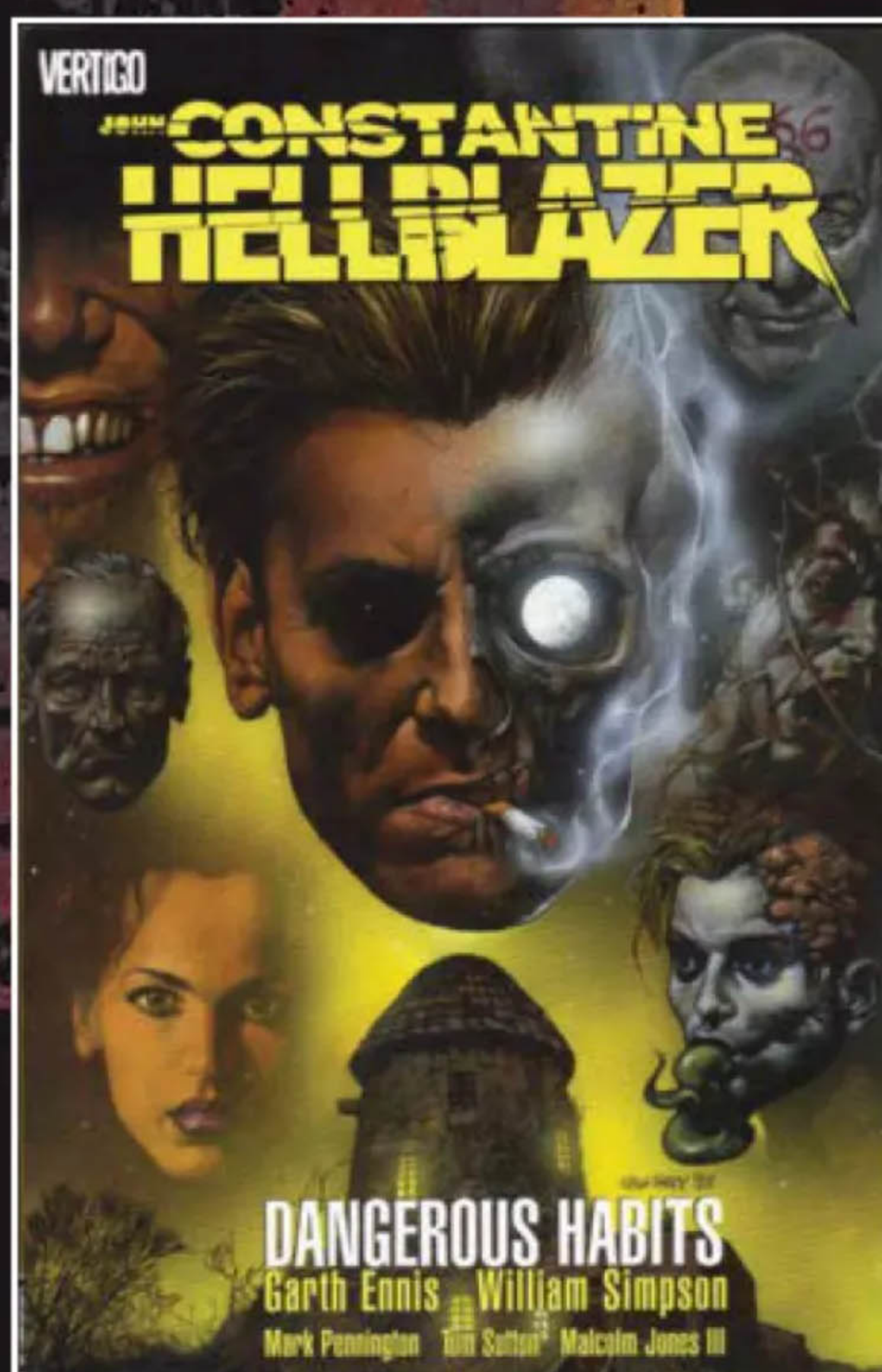
You'll remember the naked fight sequence, Mad Hatter as a drooling 'hat junkie', and the fact that in this world, cold-blooded murder is a heartfelt declaration of friendship. You'd better prepare to be astounded by how cool Catman can actually be.

**"THE SERIES HIT ITS
HILARIOUS, WEIRD AND
VIOLENT STRIDE"**



RIGHT.

WHO'S
NEXT?



HELLBLAZER

John Constantine is 25 years old. During that time, the Alan Moore-created supernatural associate has battled demons and his own dangerous habits. We celebrate the character's enduring appeal

The writers on the wall

Hellblazer's best writers and their greatest works

Jamie Delano
Hellblazer #1, Hunger

Grant Morrison
Hellblazer #25, How I Learned To Love The Bomb

Neil Gaiman
Hellblazer #27, Hold Me

Garth Ennis
Hellblazer #41, Dangerous Habits

Paul Jenkins
Hellblazer #89, Dreamtime

Warren Ellis
Hellblazer #134, Haunted

Brian Azzarello
Hellblazer #146, Hard Time

Mike Carey
Hellblazer #175, Red Sepulchre

Andy Diggle
Hellblazer #230, In At The Deep End

Peter Milligan
Hellblazer #250, The Curse Of Christmas

Constantine was originally based on Sting from The Police, but when he got his own title, DC had to change his look so that they wouldn't get sued.

It's hard to believe but it's been 25 years since writer Alan Moore introduced the world to John Constantine in *Swamp Thing* #37 in June 1985. Based visually on former Police frontman Sting, John Constantine was a regular supporting character in *Swamp Thing*, acting as the main protagonist's 'spiritual adviser'. Constantine was a very different character to what the comics world was used to: a working-class Englishman, flawed and manipulative but strangely appealing at the same time. The character's social class was key, as Moore explained to *Wizard Magazine* back in 1993: "It struck me that it might be interesting for once to do an almost blue-collar warlock. Somebody who was streetwise, working class, and from a different background than the standard run of comic book mystics. Constantine started to grow out of that."

It didn't take long for the trench-coated antihero to get his own title and *Hellblazer* #1 was launched at the end of 1987. Written by a contemporary of Moore's, the acerbic fellow Northamptonite Jamie Delano, the series was a take on urban horror that was unique to the marketplace and it was certainly the sort of title that DC had never brought to life before. Longevity is rare in the comic industry, so why has John Constantine made it to his 25th birthday? Delano had some thoughts on it when he returned to the character for original graphic novel *Pandemonium*, out earlier this year.

"I'm often asked this, and the truth is I don't really know. Primarily, I suppose, Moore's original character was intrinsically strong and imbued enough with inspirational potential to encourage most of the creators who have subsequently donned the trench coat to channel Constantine's idiosyncratic world-view with integrity and skill, developing a sensibility unique in comics... one that even assaults by Hollywood failed to destroy," he told us.

Delano – with the aid of artists John Ridgway, Richard Piers Rayner and many others – managed to turn the raincoat-wearing mage from a supporting player to a main attraction in his own right. He

fleshed out his back story, gave him an interesting and varied supporting cast of his own and used the psychic landscape of a Thatcherite Britain to create a unique and distinctive territory for John Constantine. The title even gave artist Dave McKean a boost, predating his *Sandman* work and his cover images only added to the fact that *Hellblazer* was a title like no other being produced at that time.

Delano spent almost 40 issues on *Hellblazer*, broken up by a two-issue stint by future superstar Grant Morrison and a short run by Dick Foreman, and when he left the title, Constantine was living in London with an established and fleshed-out milieu distinct from *Swamp Thing*. It was Northern Irish writer Garth Ennis, just off a run on *Judge Dredd* in *2000 AD*, who steered his destiny next. The story, *Dangerous Habits*, with artist Will Simpson, was all about consequences in a classic *Hellblazer* vein: his chain smoking had caught up with him but, with this being a supernatural book, dying of cancer wasn't the only threat to the hero here. It developed the title beyond what Delano was doing with the character and was such a success that, after a single issue by John Smith, Ennis returned to *Hellblazer* with #52 and teamed up with artist Steve Dillon, another *2000 AD* alumni, on a run that lasted over 30 issues. With the addition of painter Glenn Fabry on covers, *Hellblazer* under Ennis and Dillon took the character to America, Hell, Northern Ireland, some of the dodgiest estates in England and back again. While humour was present in Delano's *Hellblazer* instalments, Ennis used a different sort of black humour to mark his run out from its predecessor. Constantine became so iconically connected with London during Ennis's run that the city almost became a supporting character. The readers also got to see a civil war in Hell and the beginnings of Constantine's battle with the First of the Fallen, plus romantic interest Kit was introduced here, a romance doomed from the start. There was something epic while remaining very grounded in Ennis and Dillon's stories. ➤



Constantine's far from the typical comic-book role model. For one, he is a very heavy smoker, which actually forms a major part of the character's plotline.

John Constantine has always walked a fine line between immoral and amoral. It's why he remains fascinating.



Constantine always exists on the fringe of the real world and mystical. He's the true outcast of comics.

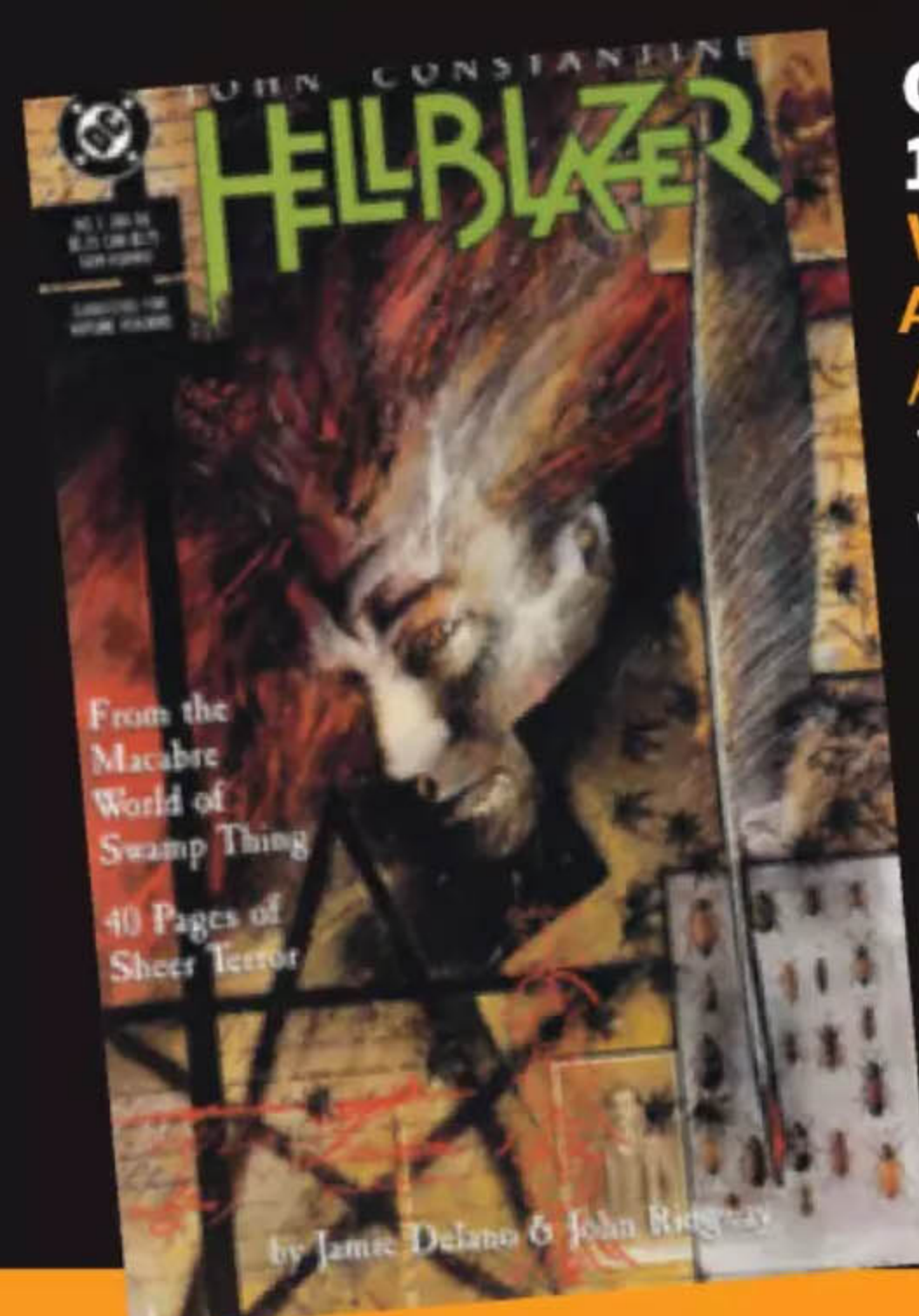
Covering all of the bases

Hellblazer's best cover artists

Hellblazer is a title that has become known for its striking covers and it could be argued that it was the first regular comic book to use its covers to make a very specific point. The first cover artist, Dave McKean, even built some of the images for his work. The list of artists who have graced its covers is very impressive indeed: Dave McKean, Kent Williams, Tim Bradstreet, Simon Bisley, Sean Phillips, Glenn Fabry, Lee Bermejo and David Lloyd.

HELLBLAZER

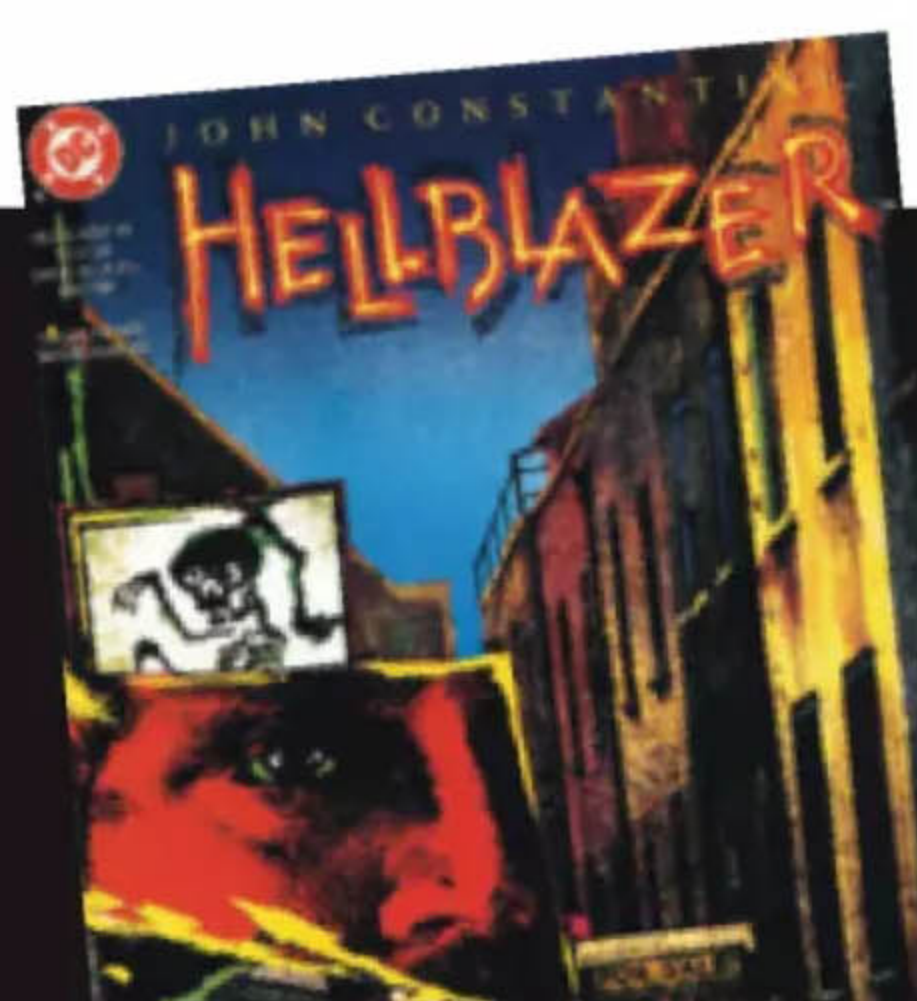
On the shelf
Key Hellblazer storylines



Original Sins, issues 1-9 (1987-1988)

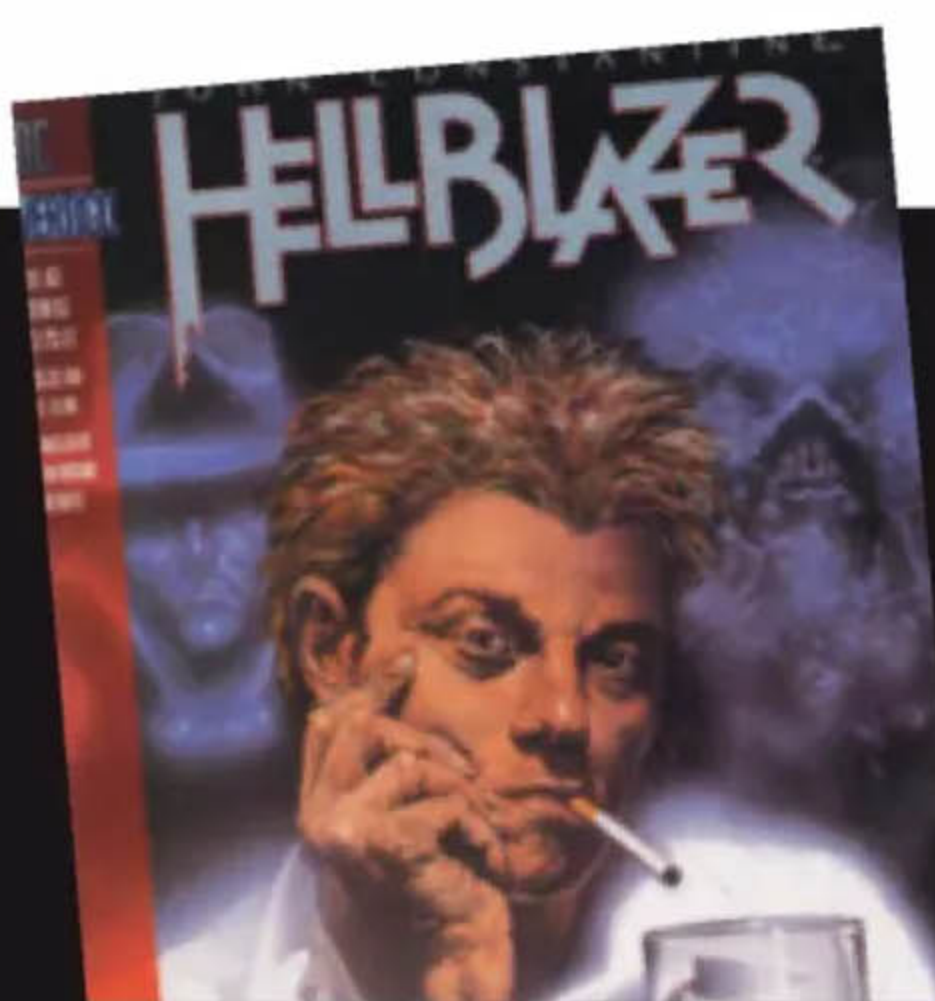
Writer: Jamie Delano
Artists: John Ridgway, Alfredo Alcalá

This was the first run with Constantine as the main protagonist, with Delano relocating the action to a late-Eighties England, accompanied by suitably creepy art from John Ridgway and distinctive covers by Dave McKean.



Dangerous Habits, issues 41-46 (1991)

Writer: Garth Ennis
Artists: Will Simpson, Mark Pennington
Dangerous Habits is the story that the film was loosely based on, where Ennis made the title his own, giving Constantine a seemingly incurable disease and pitting him against the forces of Hell.



Fear And Loathing, issues 62-67, Special 1 (1993)

Writer: Garth Ennis
Artist: Steve Dillon
Ennis shifts the status quo here with Constantine homeless and at the mercy of the King of Vampires. Ennis's more personal tales are matched by Steve Dillon's simple but brilliant artwork.



Rake At The Gates Of Hell, issues 78-83, Heartland 1 (1994)

Writer: Garth Ennis
Artist: Steve Dillon
Constantine has made a deal with the Devil and here he comes to collect. Plus we see the fate of Kit. A true slice of urban horror that shows why Ennis and Dillon cast such a long shadow over the series.



Sins Of The Father, issue 100 (1996)

Writer: Paul Jenkins
Artist: Sean Phillips
As Constantine lies in a coma, he takes a tour of Hell and seemingly meets his damned father. Jenkins was adept at stories with emotional depth and, like Dillon, Phillips has an artistic simplicity that connects with the reader.

➤ Dillon sees the appeal of the character as very simple: "Constantine is a different sort of character in a well-used genre. In a world of sorcery and demons he's no Merlin or Doctor Strange but a down-to-earth type who you wouldn't look twice at if you saw him in the pub. This has given his writers the flexibility to write more realistic stories with only a hint of fantasy if they chose to do so. Those stories always contrasted nicely with the more epic 'angel and demon' tales. Another difference is that, even though it was aimed at a mainly American audience, it is a very British book but Constantine was not the sort of Brit the Americans were used to seeing in their media. Rather than an upper class reserved type, he was a working-class chancer with a roguish charm and a liking for a pint and a smoke. Long may he continue," he revealed.

Ennis and Dillon cast a long shadow on the series with their run and whoever took over the title after them would have a hard act to follow. When the pair left to create *Preacher* for Vertigo, *Hellblazer's* reins were briefly handed over to another British writer, Eddie Campbell, after a one-issue return from the man who started it all, Jamie Delano. Campbell's run only lasted for four issues but Paul Jenkins, an ex-pat Yorkshireman who had worked for *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* publisher Mirage, took over with artist Sean Phillips, who had come from Fleetway, where he'd drawn *New Statesmen* for *Crisis* and Devlin Waugh for the *Judge Dredd Magazine*. Jenkins increased

Constantine's circle of friends and made it a less violent book than it was under Ennis and Dillon's tenure and he was on *Hellblazer* for 39 issues, longer than any of his predecessors. The title celebrated its 100th issue under Jenkins and Phillips, too, but its popularity wasn't what it was with Ennis and Dillon, despite the fact that visually it was some of Sean Phillips' best work to date.

Ennis came back for a four-issue story but Dillon wasn't with him: it was illustrated by John Higgins instead, so some of the spark that Ennis brought to the book on his original run was lacking.

The next writer who took on Constantine was Essex-based Warren Ellis. At the time, Ellis was a hot new writer, known for WildStorm's acclaimed *Planetary* series and critically lauded superhero book *Stormwatch*. He seemed eminently qualified to write the adventures of the sardonic mage, as he had displayed his credentials in *Transmetropolitan* for Vertigo, which admittedly was a science-fiction title, but there was plenty of urban horror there too. But his run was truncated over a controversy about a story he wrote about student-on-student shootings in American schools. In the wake of the real-life shooting at Columbine, there had been a change in editorial policy at DC and they chose not to publish the story. Ellis was off *Hellblazer*.

After a two-issue stint by Croatian creator Darko Macan, the next man to take over the title was a first for *Hellblazer*, as it was an American writer. Brian Azzarello had proven himself on award-winning book *100 Bullets*, also for Vertigo, so he seemed like a good fit. He wasn't

“Love... there’s a word that’s foreign to you boyo. I don’t think you can feel it” (Brian Azzarello)

surprised that the character has survived two-and-a-half decades: “A toast: To John Constantine, on the occasion of his 25th Anniversary... How have you managed to last so long? You’re vain, cruel and self-serving; there’s not one charitable bone in your body. You don’t do anything good unless you’re pushed to the wall, or it ultimately benefits you to do so. You treat your friends like weak shit on your shoes, and have a deeper respect for them you despise than for those that love you. Love... there’s a word that’s foreign to you boyo, eh? I don’t think you can feel it. Sure, you’re pantomime loving – that’s part of the con – but at the end of the day, it’s always been all about you, hasn’t it? So how’d you last so long? Because you’re just like us, Con-Job. Chin chin, you arrogant bastard.”

Azzarello’s run took Constantine out of London and England to the USA, where Moore first introduced readers to him. But reaction was mixed to his stories

and Vertigo obviously took note because the next writer was another Brit, Mike Carey. A former teacher and Oxford graduate, Carey brought magic back to the title and harkened back to both the Delano and Ennis run in terms of its general feel and cast of characters. He was already the writer of Vertigo’s *Lucifer* series, so bringing him to *Hellblazer* made perfect sense, as his grasp of the supernatural juxtaposed with the mundane was already proven. Carey spent 40 issues on the title, the longest tenure of any single creator, and his run is generally well regarded by both readers and critics alike.

He seemed to have a good handle on what made the character tick and, for him, Constantine’s longevity is easily explained as he pointed out to us recently. “There are a lot of different answers to that question, I think. For me, a big part of the appeal has always been the tension between

John’s life and John’s voice. He’s an initiate into every mystery imaginable – a guy who walks a shamanistic path and converses with gods and monsters. But he talks in a way that’s sardonic, smutty, irreverent, insolent, fundamentally unimpressed. He’s an everyman character, but specifically, everyman looking into the face of God and saying, ‘How’s it going, mate? Moved on the face of the waters lately?’ Or, ‘How’d you manage to get a six-day week without being in a union?’” he said.

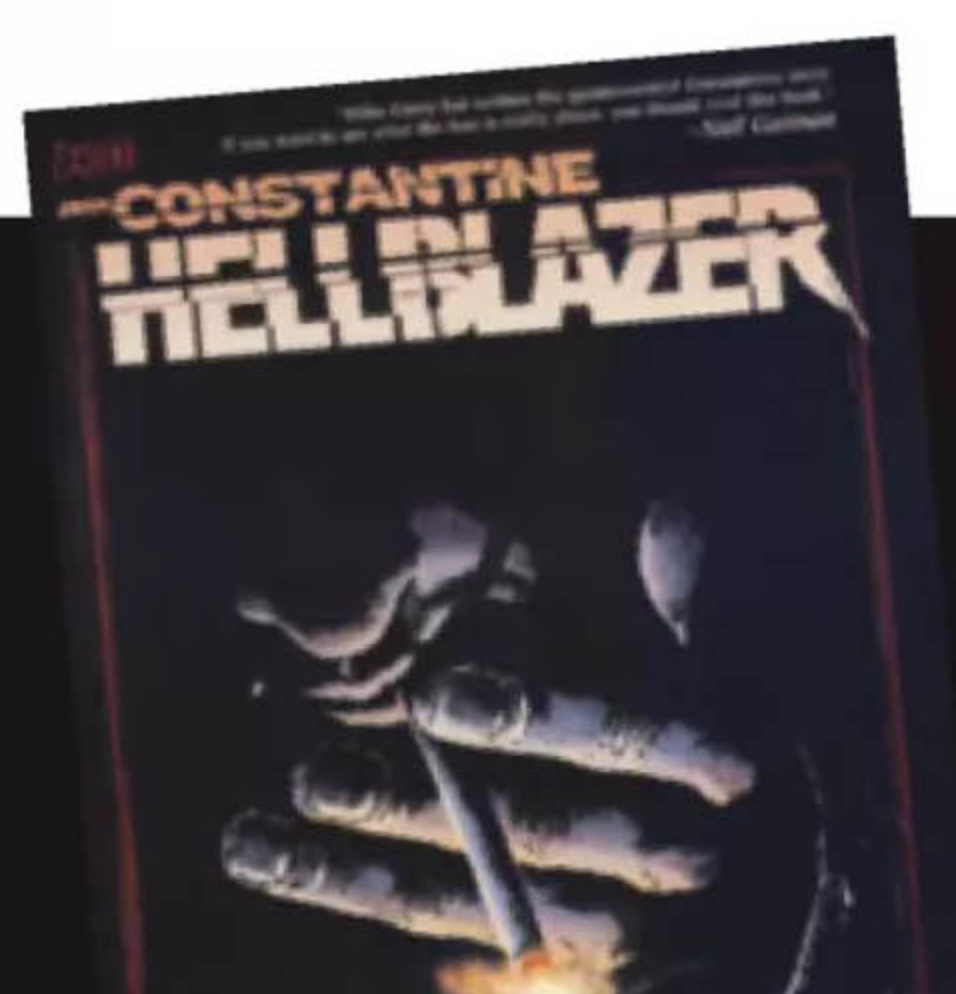
It was during Carey’s run that the film based on the character, *Constantine*, was released (2005). Starring Keanu Reeves and directed by pop promo director Francis Lawrence, the plot was loosely based on Ennis’s *Dangerous Habits* story. But Reeves was an odd choice to play Constantine and switching the setting from London to LA proved to be an unpopular decision with the comic readers who’d followed the character for 20 years. However, the film did take \$230 million at the box office, but while there continues to be the occasional internet rumour about a follow-up, this film buried any future appearances by John Constantine on the big screen.

Denise Mina was the first woman to tackle *Hellblazer*, but while the Scottish crime writer spent a year on the book, her run never really found its feet. Next, Mike Carey returned for a single issue after Mina, something that had become a bit of a tradition, and then the next writer to steer his destiny was

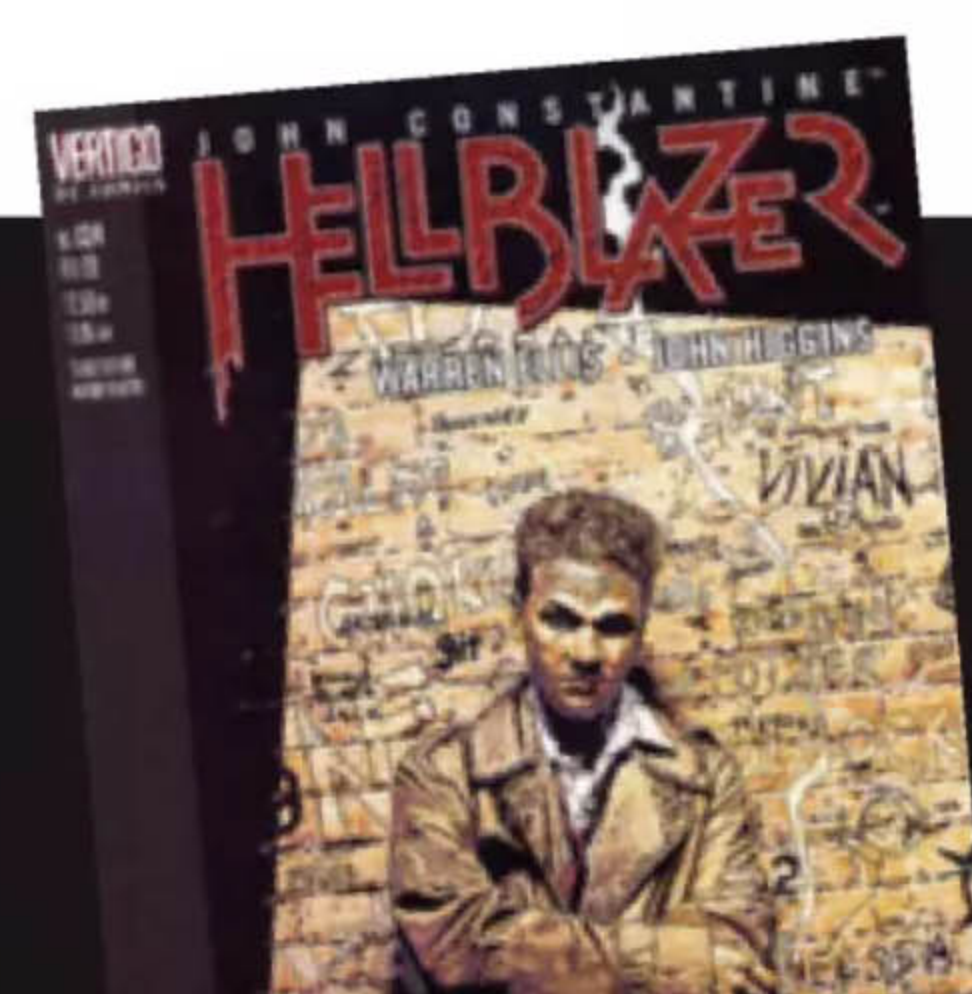
Andy Diggle. Diggle had started as editor of *2000 AD*, a role that he used to set himself up as a writer on series like *Lenny Zero* and *Snow/Tiger* for *Judge Dredd Magazine*. He had written the *Hellblazer* spin-off miniseries *Lady Constantine* back in 2003, so his appointment made sense editorially. In terms of tone, Diggle stayed close to what Carey had established for the character but it lacked the spark of Carey or Ennis. He was on the book for just under two years, but only time will tell if his efforts will be remembered with fondness or not. When *SciFiNow* spoke to him to ask about Constantine’s anniversary, Diggle had obviously given it quite a bit of thought.

“They say that inside every cynic is a disappointed idealist, and I think that pretty much nails John Constantine. I’d disagree with those who say he doesn’t

The story *Rake At The Gates Of Hell* is a reference to London Irish band The Pogues, whose song of the same name appears in Alex Cox’s film *Straight To Hell*.



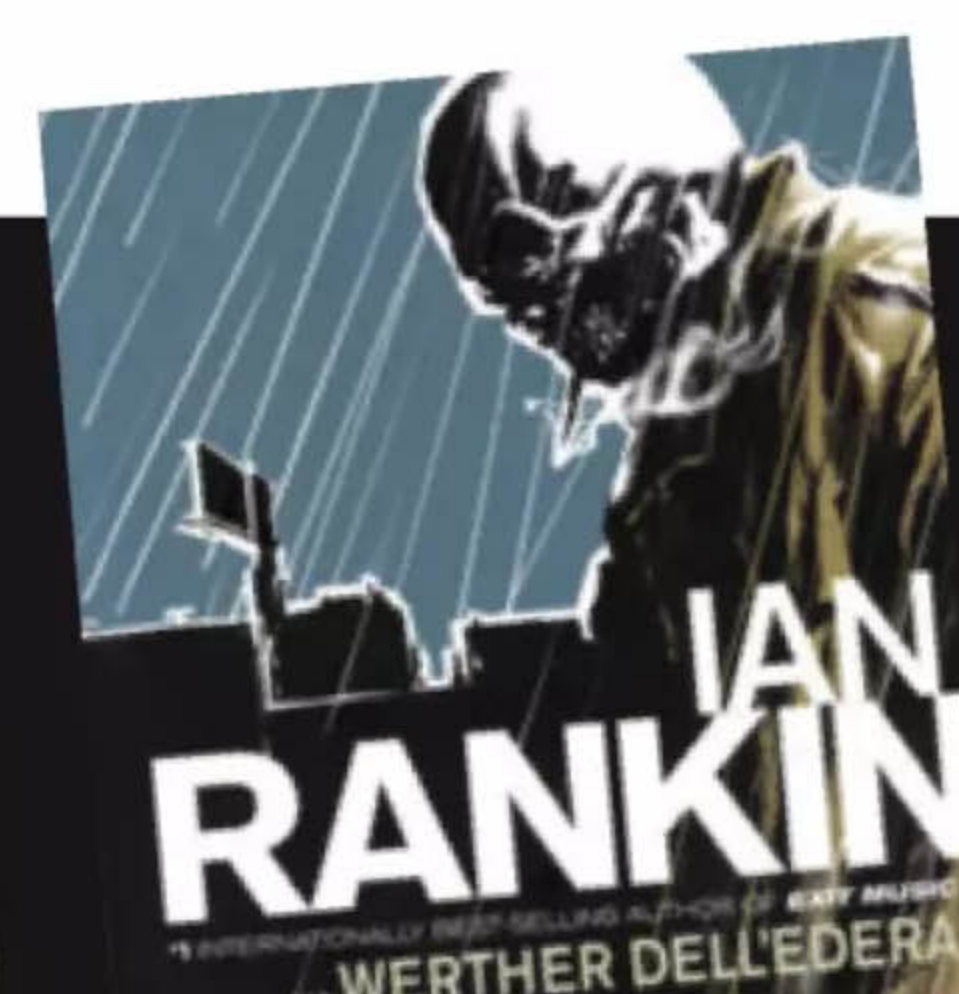
All His Engines, original graphic novel (2005)
Writer: Mike Carey
Artist: Leonardo Manco
Constantine has to prevent a plague that’s afflicting children across London, a quest that leads him to LA. This is one of the creepiest JC stories ever, thanks partly to Manco’s seriously deranged artwork.



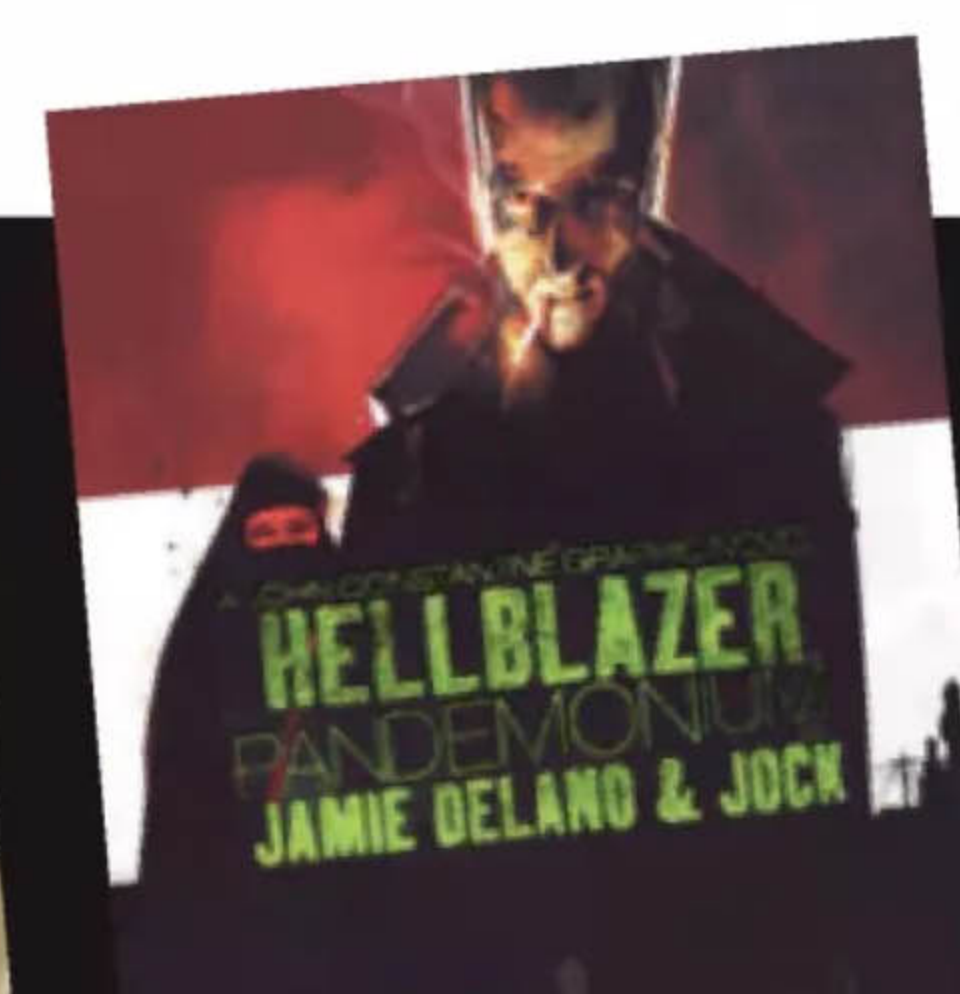
Haunted & Setting Sun, issues 134-143 (1999)
Writer: Warren Ellis
Artists: Various
Even though Ellis was on the book less than a year, he made a huge impact on the character. Taking us on a tour of London using JC as our guide, Ellis puts extra flesh on the protagonist’s bones.



Joyride, issues 230-237 (2007)
Writer: Andy Diggle
Artist: Leonardo Manco
Andy Diggle’s initial storyline looked at supernatural violence on a South London housing estate and displayed a deft hand with the character. It remains one of the most accessible modern *Hellblazer* arcs.



Dark Entries (2009)
Writer: Ian Rankin
Artist: Werther Dell’edera
While *Dark Entries* is flawed artistically, Rankin turns in a solid effort looking at the modern phenomena of reality television. The famed author is one of a number of high-profile prose writers who have ventured into Constantine’s world.



Pandemonium (2010)
Writer: Jamie Delano
Artist: Jock
Delano’s return to the character was explosive, showing that he’s never lost his affinity for the character, and *Pandemonium* was also ably abetted by accomplished interior work by noted cover artist Jock. A perfect way to celebrate the character’s anniversary.



HELLBLAZER

In the cinema

The mistakes of ignoring the source material

The film had been mooted for several years but it only became a reality in 2004 when director Francis Lawrence became attached to it. The problem with it was the fact that Hollywood decided it would be more appealing to viewers if they moved the setting from England to America and changed Constantine from an English to an American character. The problem was that, once they removed what made the comic different, then all they were left with was a generic horror action movie in the vein of *Angel Heart*. None of the supporting cast survived the transition from comics to the big screen. Keanu Reeves as Constantine was miscast, although Tilda Swinton as Gabriel was a canny choice and the film did bring Shia LaBeouf to the world's attention.

Despite its critical reception, especially among comic readers, it did do reasonably well at the box office, taking \$230 million. In fact, Reeves even talked about a sequel for a while and is quoted as saying: "I would do that in a second," but then he added, "They're producers, so they have to be optimistic. It's not up to me, man. It's up to whomever wants to provide the resources to make that movie. I don't think Warner Bros. is going to do it. I don't think it makes fiscal sense for them, because they don't feel it will make money." Director Lawrence stated that he would return, but only in a producing capacity. However, things have been very quiet since 2008 and so it is unlikely that we shall ever see a follow-up to *Constantine*.



This image is from *Hellblazer: Pandemonium*, marking the return of original series writer Jamie Delano.

➤ have a charitable bone in his body, or only does good when he's forced into it. Quite the opposite, in fact. He's risked his life – and afterlife – for the greater good on countless occasions. Okay, so as often as not he'd fuck it up spectacularly, often with even more horrific

In 2009, Vertigo published *Dark Entries*, an original graphic novel and the first in its Vertigo Crime sub-imprint. Described as a 'John Constantine Novel', it was written by bestselling crime author Ian (Rebus) Rankin. A 214-page black-and-white story that threw Constantine

"The potential for new stories are endless. He's like Doctor Who in that way" (Tim Bradstreet)

consequences. But the point is, he *tries*. He doesn't just shrug off the horror he sees in the world around him, and try to ignore it like we do. He bloody well does something about it. Someone much smarter than me (I wish I could remember who it was! Paul Jenkins maybe?) once described Constantine as a hedonist whose conscience keeps getting in the way, and I think that sums him up pretty well. And, of course, the fact that we're even discussing him in this way suggests he's a lot more fully rounded a character than you find in many comics. He has a life, not an 'origin story'. He's flawed and contradictory and often self-defeating but he struggles on, screaming his defiance into the face of an uncaring universe. In other words, a human being."

Even though the character of Constantine has become most associated with London, he actually hails from the northern city of Liverpool.

After the newer names route, Vertigo turned to one of the writers who had been there before the imprint even had a name. Peter Milligan was a contemporary of Grant Morrison, who had won plaudits with his work on *Animal Man*, *Shade The Changing Man* and *Enigma* for DC. Milligan has always been able to meld bizarre supernatural happenings with a very British sensibility and his run on *Hellblazer* shows a man with renewed vigour for his work. Artistically, he has even managed to re-energise artist Simon Bisley, who has produced his best efforts in years in tandem with Milligan.

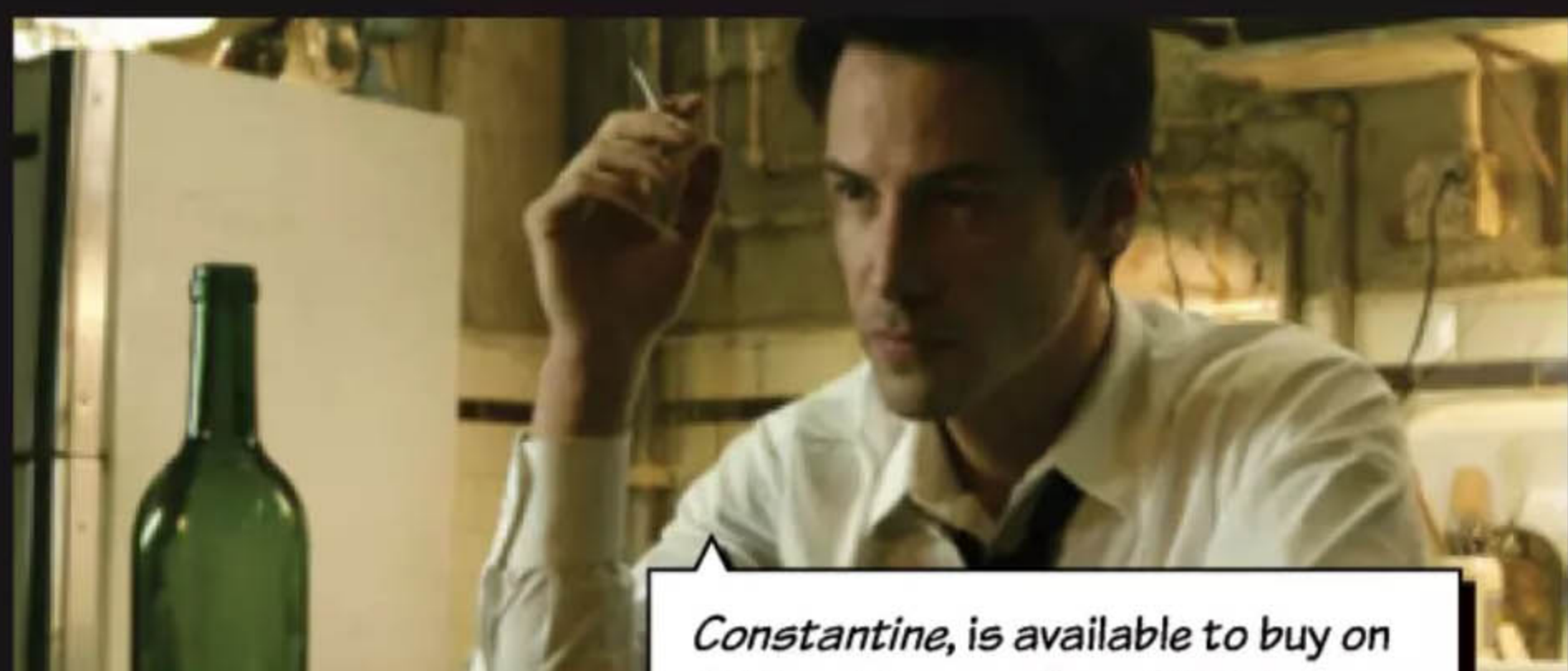
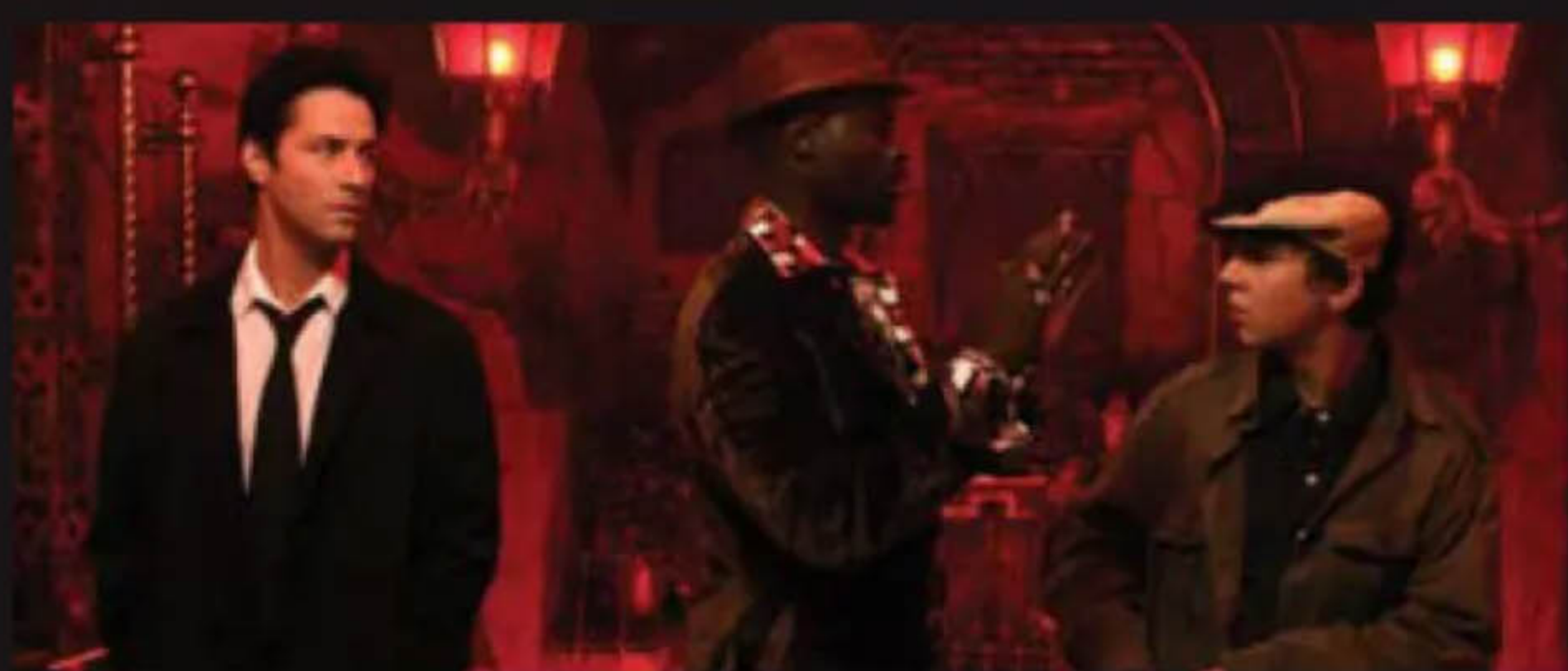
It is obvious that he understands what makes Constantine work, and he told us recently why he thinks the title has managed to continue after all these years. "The series continues to engage and entertain because Constantine is such a complex character. He's the perfect flawed and fucked-up everyman for our times. Even after all this time, it seems that each new writer finds new things he wants to say, through the old mage."

into the world of reality TV with just the sort of blackly humorous feel that *Hellblazer* has made its trademark.

While its sales are lower than they have been, thanks mainly to the vagaries of a changing comic market, *Hellblazer* continues to be a regular presence in an industry filled with fly-by-night characters and companies. There are over 40 collections of *Hellblazer* material currently available, so there's little danger of the trench-coated spiv disappearing any time soon. So let's raise a glass to the difficult bastard and we'll leave the last word to artist Tim Bradstreet, whose covers graced *Hellblazer* for an impressive 81 issues.

"Has it been 25 years? Goodness. Well I believe that when Vertigo first launched their imprint they likely had no idea they'd still be pumping out issues of a regular series for Constantine in 2010... The appeal for the reading audience, to me, is staggering. There is such a large and rich history for the character now that the potential for new and original stories are endless. He's kind of like *Doctor Who* in that way. You could set Constantine down about anywhere, from a nameless pub to the Isle of Gruinard (Anthrax Island) and you've got the potential for a great adventure. Plus you have writers the world over who would love a crack at writing the guy. I remember Denise Mina once said she'd 'eat her own guts to write *Hellblazer*'. Well you can't get much more exuberant than that!... The reading audience includes a lot of those professionals and the appeal is obvious. In an industry dominated by superheroes, there is one non-superhero character that has stood alone for 25 years, and that's John Constantine: *Hellblazer*."

Collected editions of *Hellblazer* are published by Titan Comics in the UK.



Constantine is available to buy on DVD and Blu-ray from £16.99

HELLBLAZER: DANGEROUS HABITS

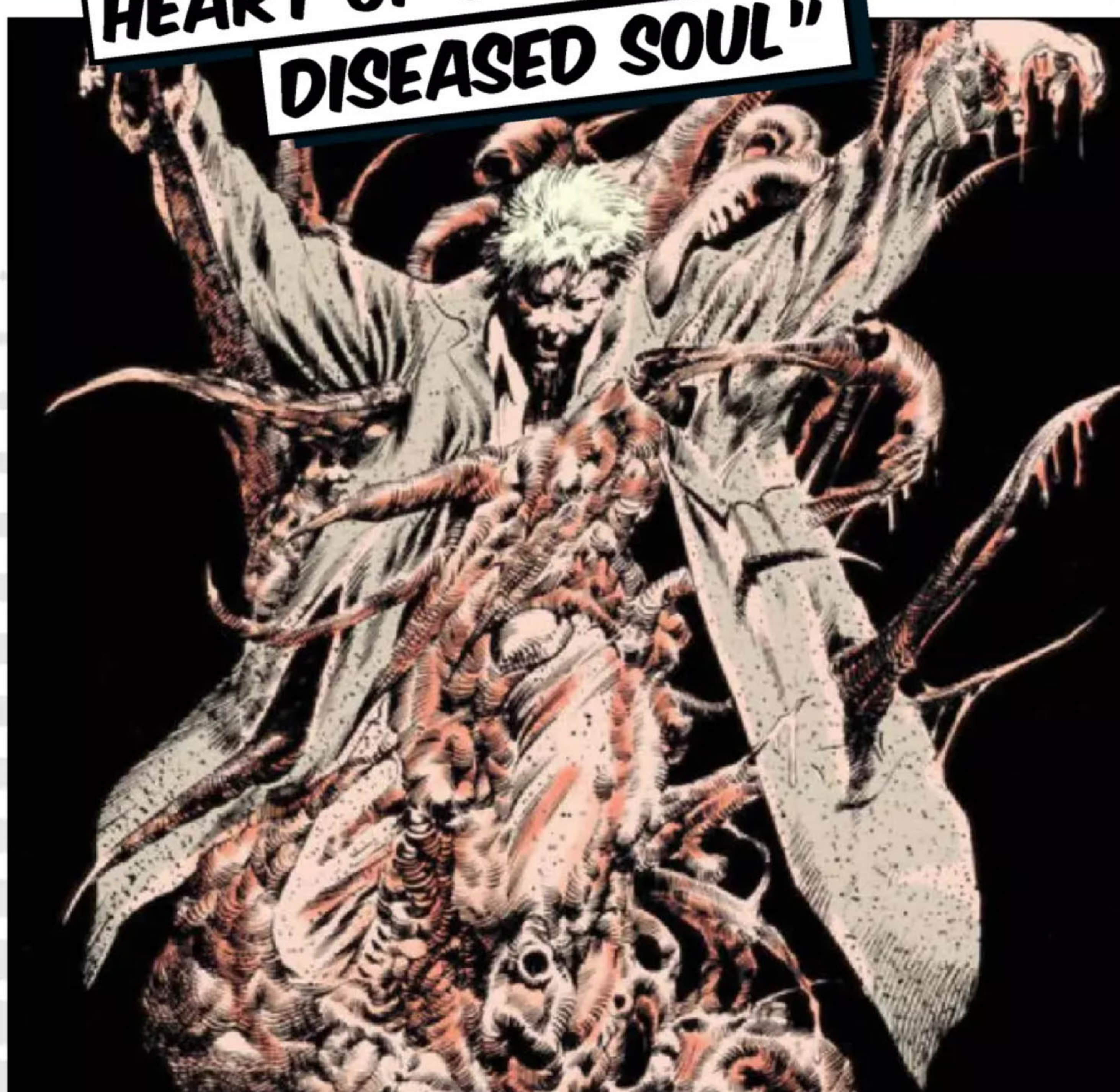
Details Originally published Hellblazer #41-#46 (1991) **Publisher** Vertigo
Writer Garth Ennis **Artist** Will Simpson **Collected in** Hellblazer: Dangerous Habits
Available digitally Comixology, Kindle

Banish all memory of the movie from your mind; *this* is how you tell the story of John Constantine's lung cancer.

For 300 glorious issues, *Hellblazer* trod its own dark path, as mage Constantine blagged his way through all manner of supernatural threats, all the while aging in real time (a rare feat in comics). But no story sticks in the mind quite like *Dangerous Habits*. Incoming writer Garth Ennis crafted a story that went right to the heart of Constantine's diseased soul, showcasing his heroism, weaknesses, and – above all – his desperate and selfish will to survive. Ennis remembers at all times that Constantine isn't a nice person – but that doesn't mean you can't root for him.

And, in the most perfect Constantine moment ever committed to the page, how does he avert death? Not through magic skills, or powerful friends or luck, but through lying and cheating his arse off.

**"WENT RIGHT TO THE
HEART OF CONSTANTINE'S
DISEASED SOUL"**



GEMMA BOVERY

Details Originally published Gemma Boverly (serialised - 1998)

Publisher Jonathan Cape **Writer** Posy Simmonds **Artist** Posy Simmonds

Collected in Gemma Boverly **Available digitally** N/A

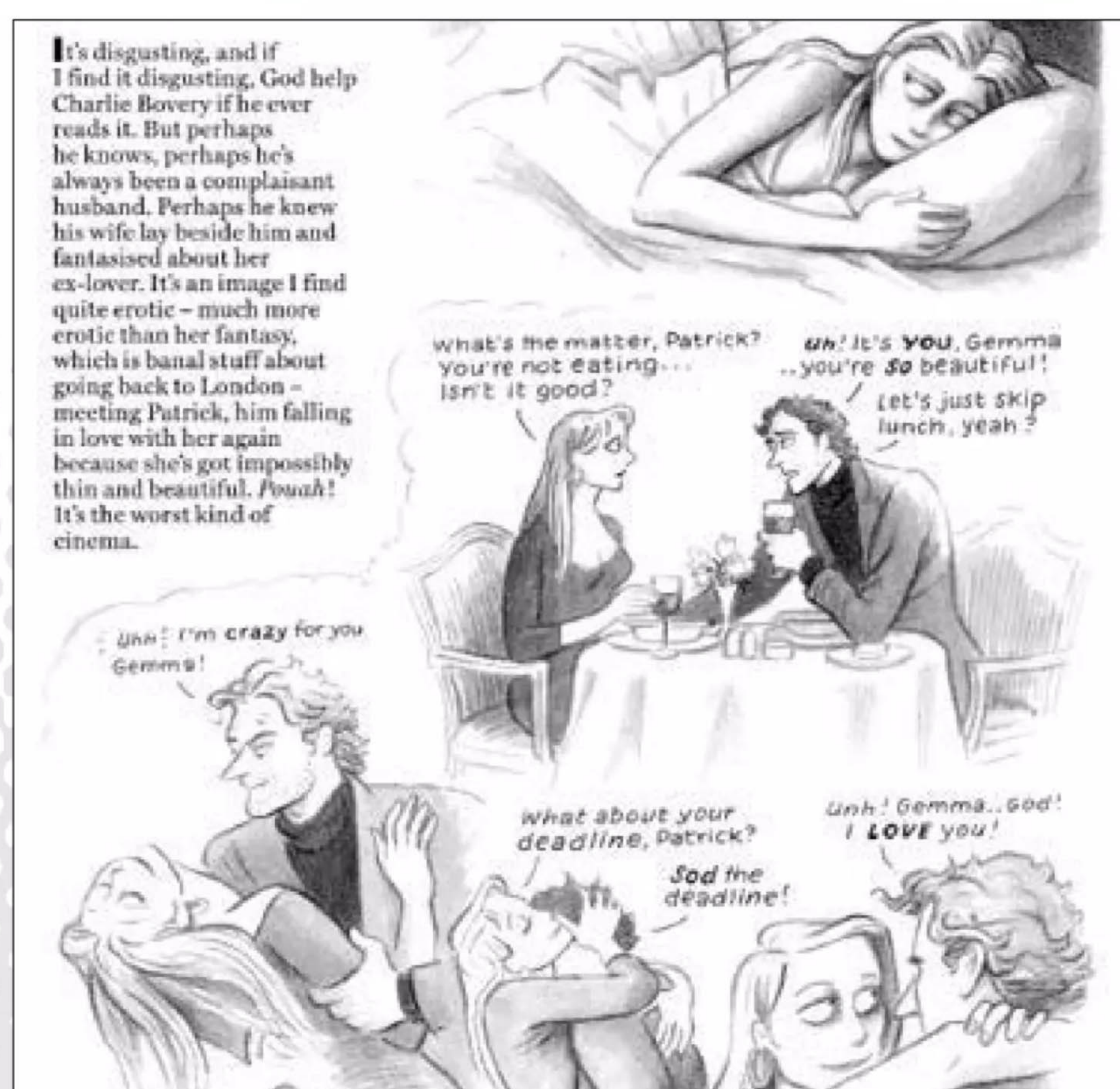
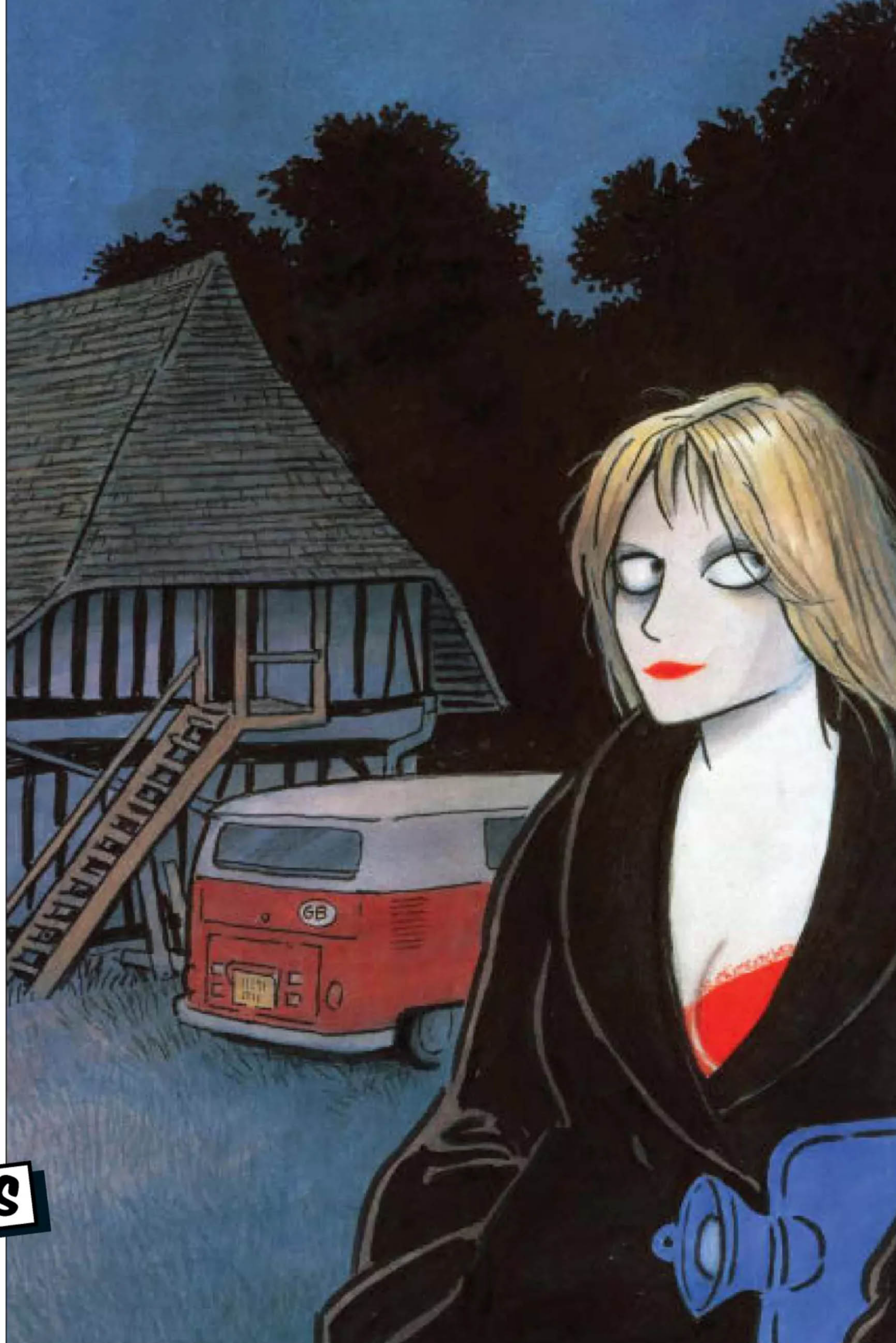
Posy Simmonds is the undisputed godmother of British comics.

Perfectly encapsulating middle-class life for *Guardian* readers over the years with her comic strips, Simmonds' first graphic novel, *Gemma Boverly*, was published as a graphic novel following the conclusion of its serialisation.

The last months of the recently deceased Gemma, who had moved to France from London with her husband, are told via the recollections of the local baker, Raymond Joubert, and stolen pages from her journal. Her affairs and desires draw numerous parallels with Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, a fact Joubert is aware and frightened of. Part tragi-comedy and part English vs French sensibilities, Simmonds works her magic as the characters twinkle with life among the social satire.

From illustrated text to comic panels and back again, this is undoubtedly Simmonds' greatest work, full of many a home truth and packed with endearingly thought up images.

**"PERFECTLY ENCAPSULATES
MIDDLE-CLASS LIFE"**



THE INVISIBLES

SAY YOU WANT A REVOLUTION

"Watch out for Grant Morrison.
he's a regular comics apocalypse."
— Spin



THE INVISIBLES: SAY YOU WANT A REVOLUTION

Details Originally published The Invisibles #1-8 (1994-95) **Publisher** Vertigo
Writer Grant Morrison **Artist** Steve Yeowell, Jill Thompson **Collected in** The Invisibles,
Vol 1: Say You Want A Revolution **Available digitally** Comixology, Kindle

The Invisibles are a secret organisation who are battling against the physical and psychic oppression of the forces of order that seek to repress humanity's growth. Our hero, Dane McGowan, reckons this sounds ridiculous, but is saved from lobotomy and castration at a correctional institution by King Mob and his team of anarchists. After a speedy induction, Dane is projected back into the past in order to recruit the Marquis de Sade.

The aforementioned forces of order, The Outer Church, are interdimensional alien gods. Add in the philosophy, paranoia, sex, magic, biography, travel, drugs, religion, UFOs and the fact that the series is one giant hypersigil, and you have one hell of a ride. But actually, the core message of the book is hope – a fervent hope that change was in the air at the end of the 20th Century before everything went to shit again.

King Mob is not, as many suggest, an author insert for Morrison, but rather a fiction suit. That is, King Mob is literally Morrison's way of interacting with his paper universe.



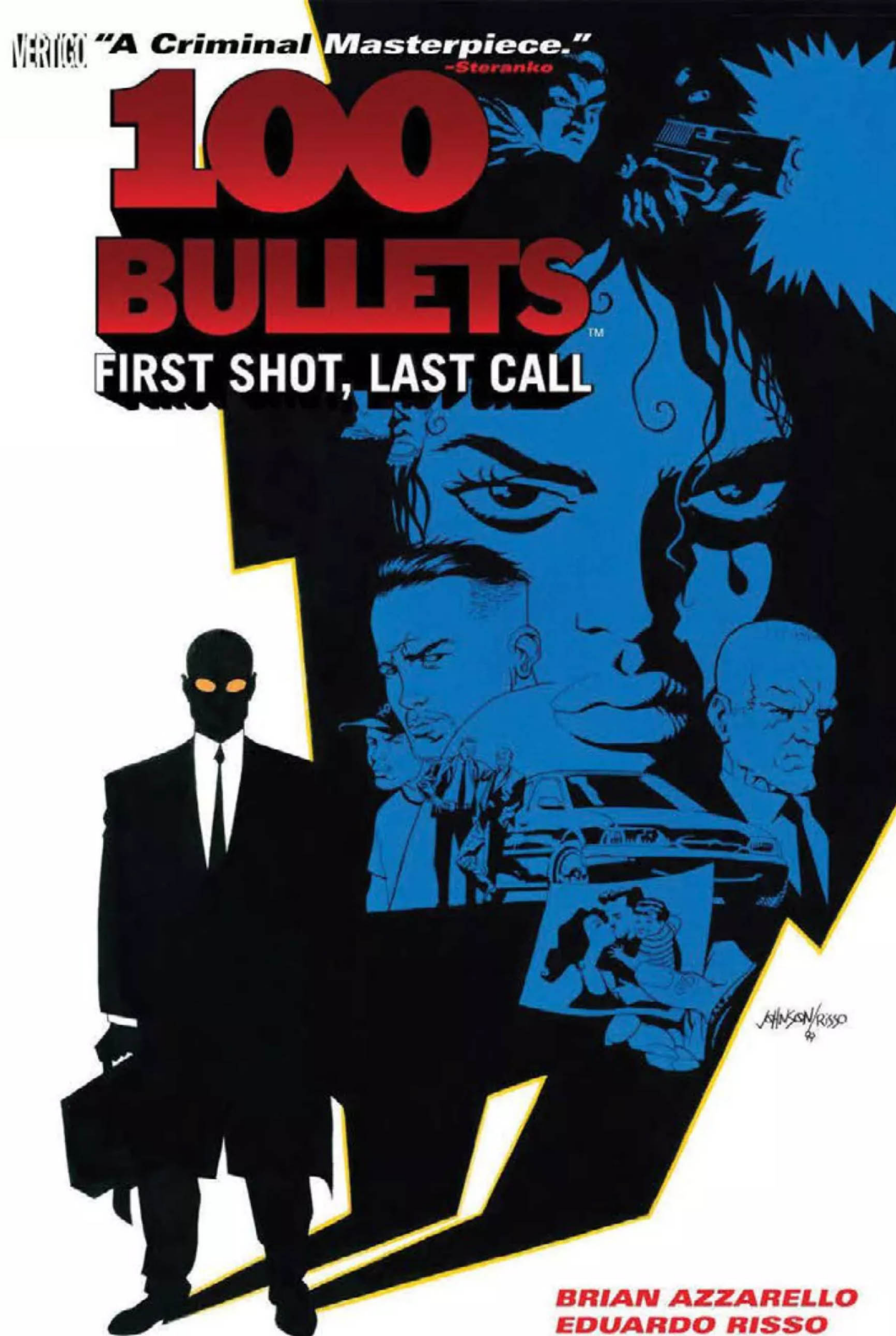
100 BULLETS: FIRST SHOT, LAST CALL

Details Originally published 100 Bullets #1-5 (1999) **Publisher** Vertigo
Writer Brian Azzarello **Artist** Eduardo Riso **Collected in** First Shot, Last Call
Available digitally Comixology

If you were irretrievably wronged, and had the opportunity to balance an injustice, would you take it? *100 Bullets* heads down this dark and violent path; a high-concept crime noir comic focused on the pursuit of revenge and retribution. It all starts so simply: there's a stranger with a briefcase containing a gun, 100 untraceable bullets and directions to the person responsible for derailing your life. What comes next is a sprawling thriller that pulls you into a bloody journey exploring the nature of crime in America throughout the ages.

First Shot, Last Call is simply the first squeeze of the trigger. *100 Bullets* ran for a decade – 100 issues – and it never ceased to be consistently one of the sharpest, edgiest books available. It brought about the resurgence of crime comics and helped establish Vertigo as the home of R-rated comic-books.

**"THE FIRST SQUEEZE
OF THE TRIGGER"**



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30 Days Of Night Omnibus **Available digitally** Comixology, Kindle

Before there was *Twilight*, and before romanticising vampires became the common fad, you got *30 Days Of Night*. Vampires menace an Alaskan town that's so close to the Arctic circle the sun is about to set for a month. The story is relentless, throwing violence and horror at the readers and killing characters with no regard whatsoever, leading up to one of the best endings in decades.

30 Days Of Night put Steve Niles and Ben Templesmith on the map, and it's easy to see why. Niles has demonstrated his love for classic horror ideas time and again, as well as a persistent ability to find new approaches to them, and that all started here.

TempleSmith's nightmarish, scratchy and feverish art is a perfect fit for the impossibly bleak setting, and there's real violence and ferocity to how the vampires act. A classic piece of horror and a landmark for two of the best creators of this generation.

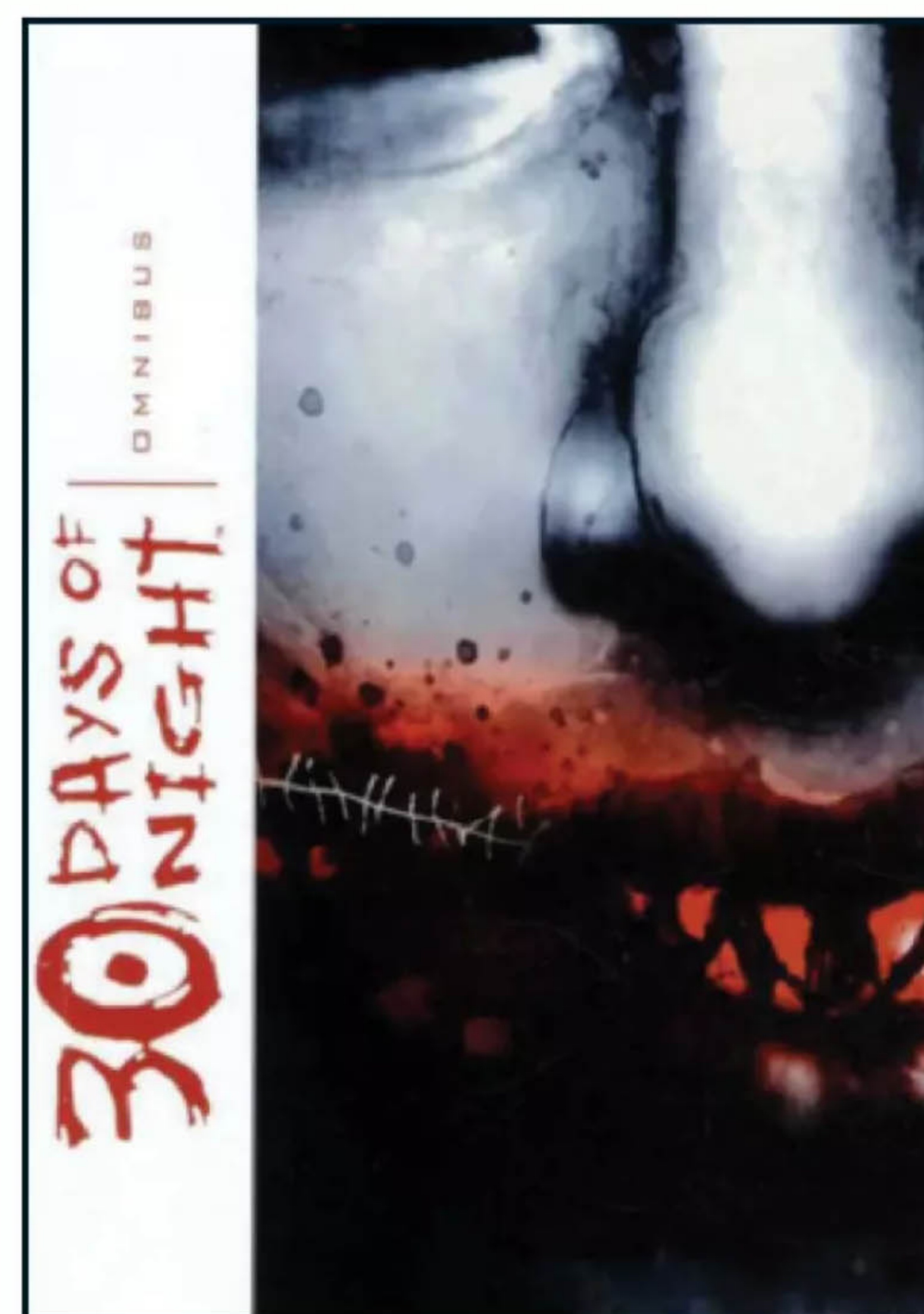
**"A CLASSIC
PIECE OF
HORROR"**



STEVE NILES PAGE TO SCREAM



WITH *30 DAYS OF NIGHT*, STEVE NILES HELPED PIONEER THE BLOODY REBIRTH OF HORROR COMIC-BOOKS, AND NOW FINDS HOLLYWOOD CLAMOURING TO ADAPT HIS WORK. WE CHAT TO THE WRITER ABOUT CLASSIC HORROR AND FUTURE PLANS



Having created series like *30 Days Of Night* and *Criminal Macabre* during his 20+ years in comics, Steve Niles is up there with *The Walking Dead* creator Robert Kirkman, *Locke & Key*'s Joe Hill and *American Vampire*'s Scott Snyder in the ranks of significant graphic horror writers. His uncompromising portrayal of vampires as an animalistic, viral force in *30 Days Of Night* preceded today's obsession with bloodsuckers, and everything the writer has fashioned in the meantime demonstrates his trend foresight.

Yet when it comes to his work being adapted for the big screen, Niles seeks out collaborators who share his enthusiasm – not necessarily the highest bidder. With the 2007 adaptation of the *30 Days Of Night* miniseries, his criteria was for talent that shared his passion for the subject matter. “Enthusiasm for the material means more to me than a big option,” Niles tells us. “A good example is what happened with *30 Days Of Night*. When we were selling it, it turned into a bidding war with three studios bidding, and they all had a lot of money, but I went with the one that had Sam Raimi attached to it, because Sam knows horror.”

Of course, *30 Days* remains the biggest Hollywood project based on Niles' work to date, but he has plenty more in the pipeline, ready to find a wider audience. Recently, his well-received post-apocalyptic zombie story *Remains* was adapted for a TV movie on the Chiller channel in America. The prospect of seeing one of his own projects adapted as a made-for-TV movie was hugely exciting for Niles, who grew up watching such films, and cites the work of Dan Curtis as an influence on his own career. “He was behind *The Night Stalker* and *Dark Shadows*, and was behind all these great TV movies. Richard Matheson also used to write a ton of ABC movies of the week during the Seventies, which are pretty much exactly this kind of stuff. They were Richard Matheson short stories turned into movies for TV, so I have a special affection for them.



“WHEN WE WERE SELLING 30 DAYS OF NIGHT, IT TURNED INTO A BIDDING WAR” STEVE NILES

“I remember when I got the call about *Remains*, I could tell everybody was sort of apologetic, like, ‘Do you want to do a TV movie?’ but I was thrilled.”

Remains is one of several projects being adapted from the writer’s work. Next up may be a *Criminal Macabre* film starring Constantine-esque monster hunter Cal MacDonald, which is being developed by Universal. “After being through multiple studios, Universal really gets it,” claims Niles, “and they’re letting us do it as an R. For years, people wanted to do it as a PG-13, and I was like, ‘Have you read the comic?’

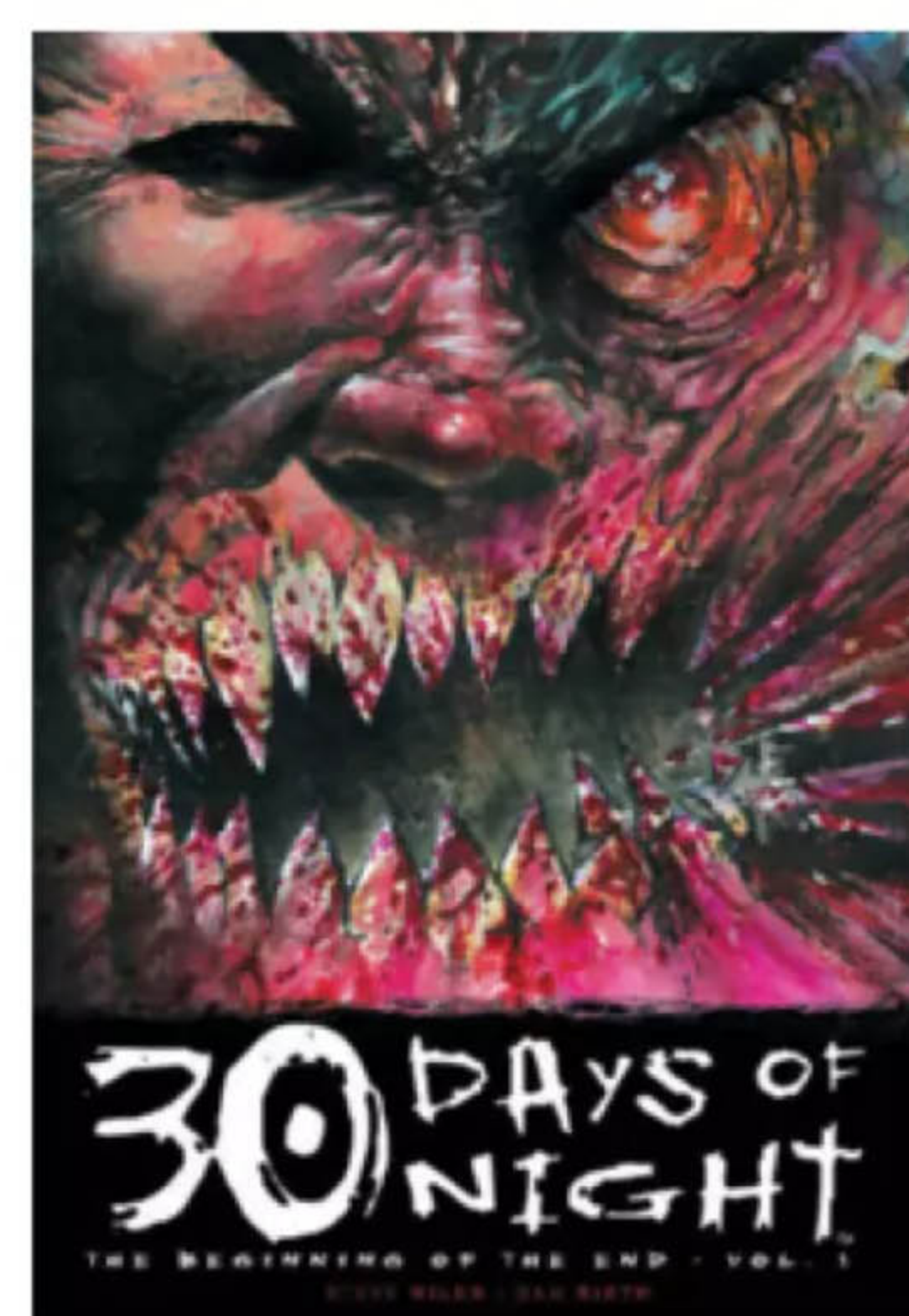


30 Days Of Night was adapted into a feature film by *Eclipse* director David Slade in 2007.

There’s really not a lot of PG-13 stuff!” I had breakfast with Mike Richardson from Dark Horse yesterday, and will hopefully have some good news in the next six months or so.

“I’m also continuing with the comics. I just turned in the latest instalment of *Criminal Macabre*, so we’re keeping the comics going, and we’re also going to reprint the novels. So yes, something will happen with Cal MacDonald. If it doesn’t pan out as a horror movie, I think it would be a wonderful series. I’ve been writing him for 20 years now, so we could have many seasons if we had it on TV.”

Just in case film/television adaptations aren’t enough, Niles confirms that he’s been approached about a possible stage version of one of his books. “I can’t say which one, because I haven’t actually met with them yet, so we still want to make sure it’s possible, but what I can say is it’s going to be one of mine and Bernie Wrightson’s,” he says, bringing up the influential artist who cut his teeth on classic chillers like *Swamp Thing*, *House Of Secrets* and *House Of Mystery* for DC Comics in the Seventies.



Niles’ work displays an inherent love for the medium.



Criminal Macabre could be the next Niles property to hit the big screen.

“What we’re trying to do is a live Bernie Wrightson comic. Bernie wants to paint the sets, so I’m going to have a problem there, because the backdrops are going to be original Bernie Wrightson art, so they’re going to be more valuable than anything!”

As for future projects, Niles seems to have a remarkable knack for predicting what the next wave of horror will be. *30 Days Of Night*, as we observed earlier, preempted the vampire boom, while *Remains* foretold the current glut of zombie-mania. He’s also re-teamed with Wrightson for IDW’s *Frankenstein*, *Alive Alive*, which will see release before the flood of upcoming *Frankenstein* spin-offs.

“I’m a fan of this stuff,” Niles reflects. “When we did *30 Days...*, it was for free, so Ben [TempleSmith, artist] and I had an opportunity to do a different kind of vampire. I’m a huge horror fan. I don’t think there’s anything I haven’t seen ten times, so I have that thing in me where I want to do my versions, but I do have a complete aversion to just doing what somebody did before. I always want to come up with some sort of fresh new take, but it really is coming out of the spirit of fun. For a horror writer, I use the word ‘fun’ a lot, but that’s really what it comes from.

“With the *Frankenstein* book, I carried Bernie’s first *Frankenstein* book around when I was a kid, and now I’m working with him on the sequel. It’s just enthusiasm, because I genuinely love this stuff. I’ve never felt I’ve been predicting anything ahead of any curve, as that’s a dangerous road to go down. I just do what I love, and I happen to love *Frankenstein*, vampires and zombies!”

Criminal Macabre is available from Dark Horse Comics, priced \$2.99 (approx £1.90). A number of Niles’ past titles, including *30 Days Of Night* and *Remains* are available digitally from Comixology.

THE LEAGUE OF EXTRAORDINARY GENTLEMEN: VOL 1

Details Originally published The League Of Extraordinary Gentlemen #1-6 (1999-2000)

Publishers ABC/Wildstorm/DC, Top Shelf, Knockabout Comics **Writer** Alan Moore

Artist Kevin O'Neill **Collected in** The League Of Extraordinary Gentlemen: Vol 1

Available digitally N/A

Alan Moore isn't exactly shy about referencing the work of others, and *The League Of Extraordinary Gentlemen* represents the peak of his metatextuality. With artist Kevin O'Neill, Moore draws together some of the great characters of Victorian literature and pits them against familiar foes.

The series is most straightforwardly entertaining in its first two volumes, as the dynamic between Mina Murray, Allan Quatermain, Hawley Griffin, Edward Hyde and Captain Nemo provides a foundation from which the story can spin off into its more obscure and outlandish moments.

It's tremendous fun to see these iconic figures taking on Moriarty and the Martian tripods, and the 'Boy's Own' hero stuff (beautifully rendered by O'Neill) is perfectly filtered through Moore's keen eye, uncovering the violence and sexuality beneath these classic creations.

His fierce intelligence and broad range of interests are at their most enjoyable when filtered through the world of *The League Of Extraordinary Gentlemen*.



"IT REPRESENTS THE PEAK OF ALAN MOORE'S METATEXTUALITY"



BRITTEN & BRÜLIGHTLY

Details Originally published Britten & Brülighly (2008) **Publisher** Jonathan Cape **Writer** Hannah Berry **Artist** Hannah Berry
Collected in Britten & Brülighly (£14.99) **Available digitally** N/A

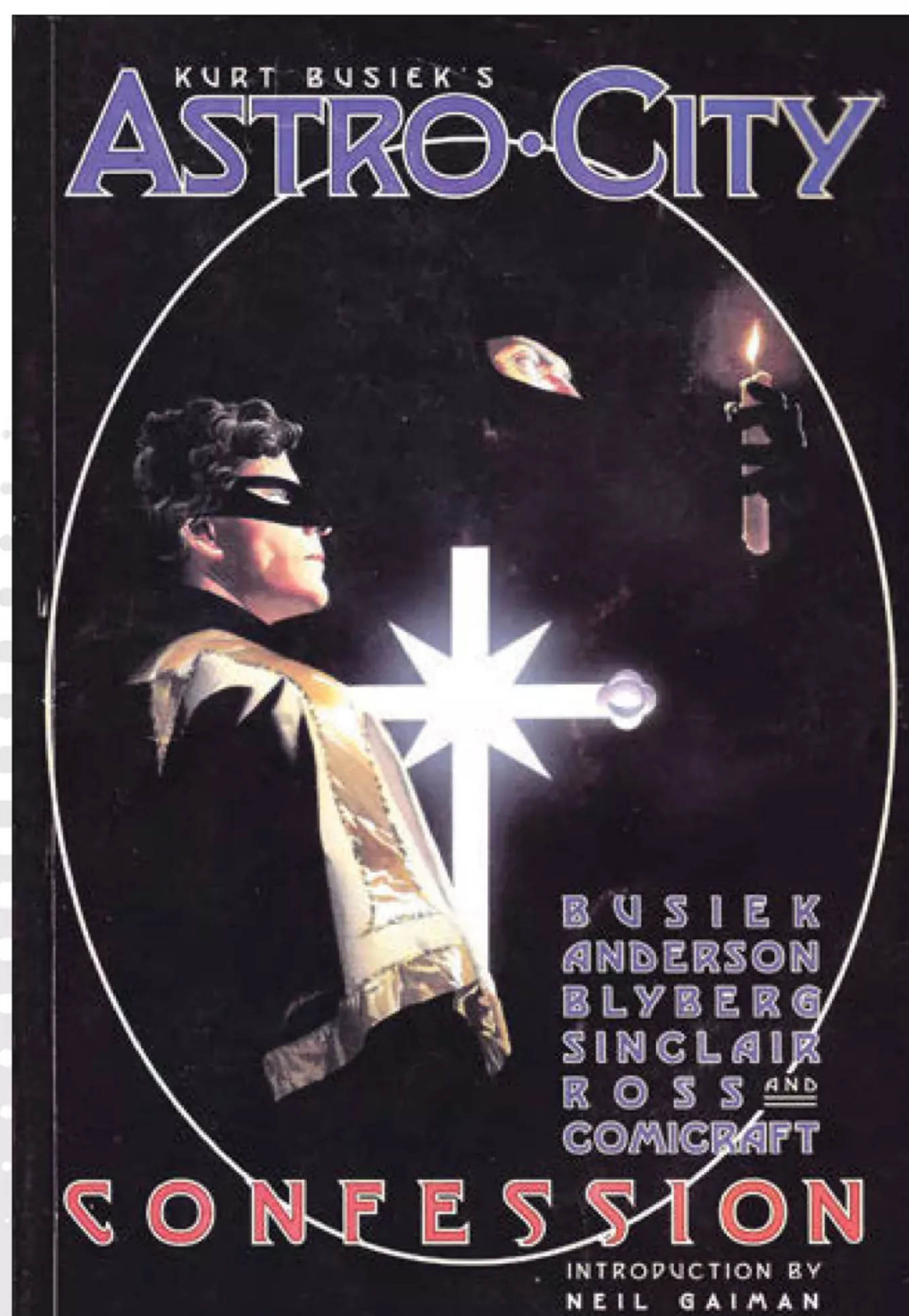
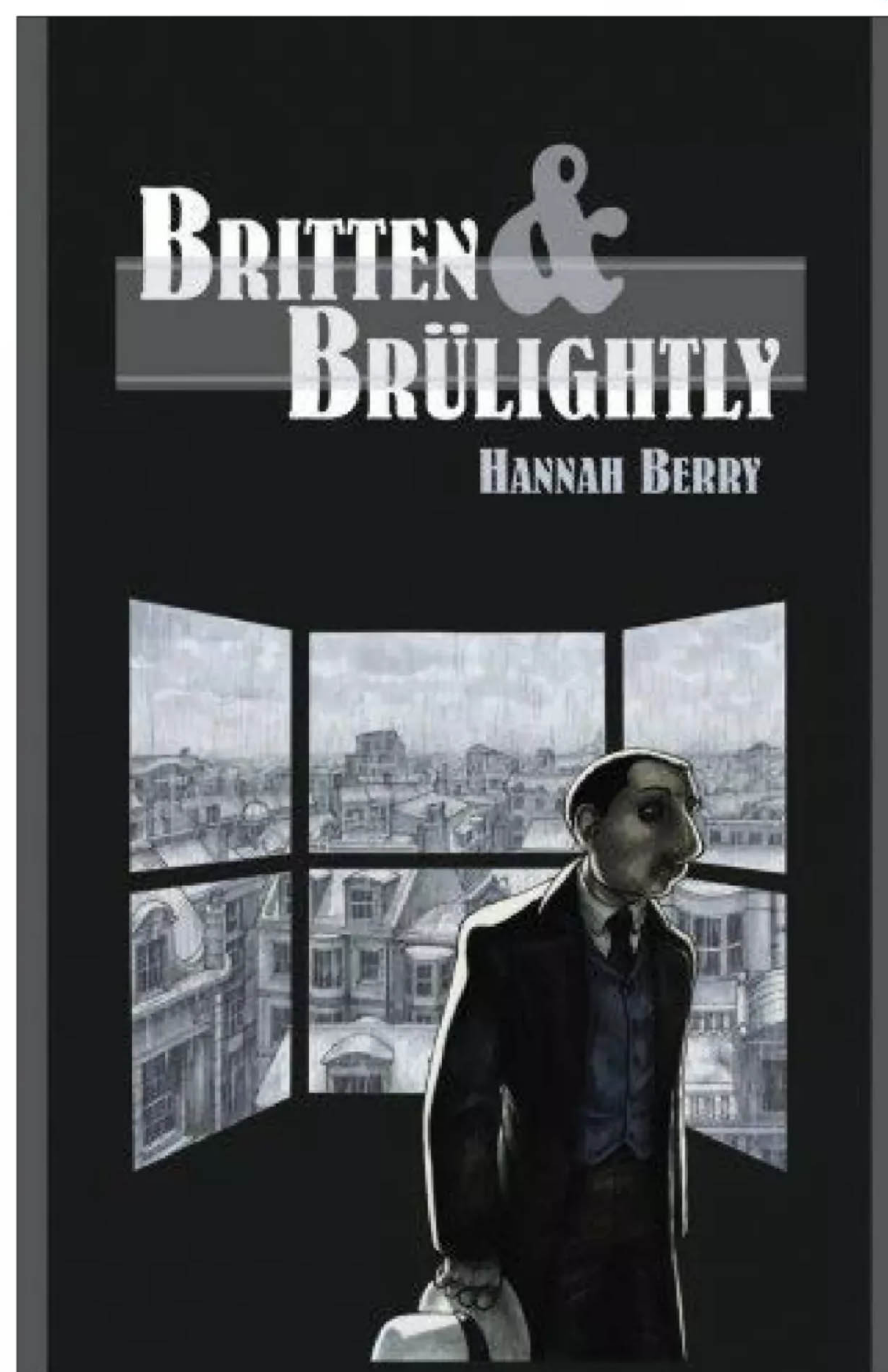
Private researcher Fernández Britten's years of uncovering people's secrets and confirming their darkest suspicions have left him teetering on the brink of a nervous breakdown. The one hope that keeps him going is the idea of redemption through delivering a truth with a positive rather than life-destroying impact. He's alone and ostracised – except for his partner, Stewart Brülighly.

This gorgeously murky noir, with a fantastic energy and wit, is truly



like nothing else on the market. With touches of Douglas Adams and Raymond Chandler, the plot zings along as Britten takes on the case of a suspicious suicide where almost nothing at all is truly what it seems.

“Don’t be lecherous. You’re a teabag.” Oh yes, and Brülighly is a sentient and rather horny teabag.



ASTRO CITY: CONFESSION

Details Originally published Astro City #4-9, #0.5 (1996-97, 1998) **Publisher** Homage Comics **Writer** Kurt Busiek
Artist Brent Anderson **Collected in** Astro City: Confession **Available digitally** N/A

Sometimes it's the small things that make a series memorable.

Astro City: Confession is on our list not for its main story arc, but for its inclusion of 'The Nearness Of You', a one-shot that explores memory, loss and love with a delicate poignancy not often seen in comics.

Of course, the main story arc ('Confession') is standout work, with an original approach to the old industry trope of superheroes being essentially immortal. 'The Nearness Of You', however, is a punch to the heart.

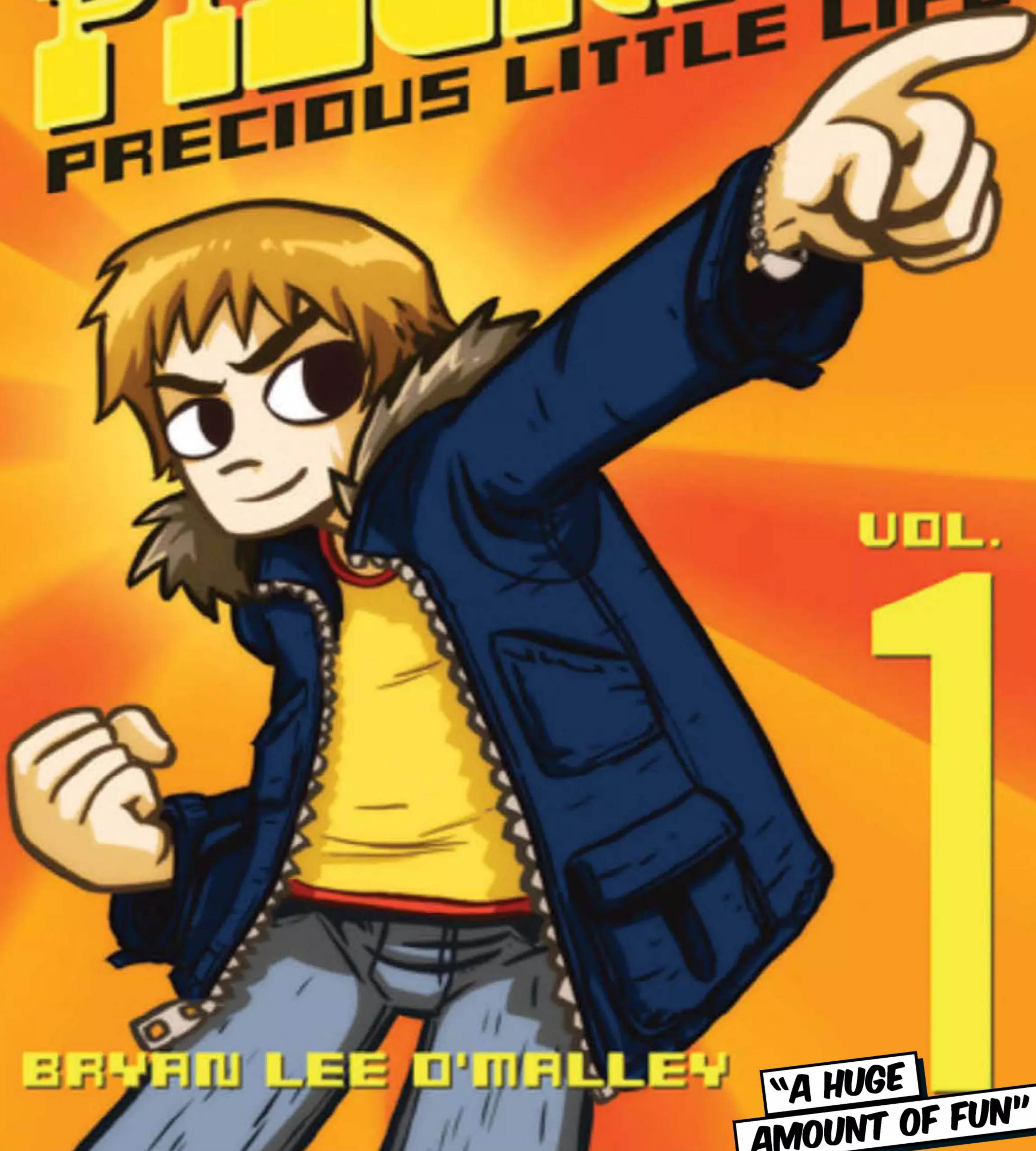
Busiek applies his interest in how superheroes' cosmic struggles affect people's everyday lives to ask a difficult question: when the realities of superhero continuities are rewritten, what happens to the realities of ordinary people, and do superheroes care?

Under the capes and battles, the story's themes are universal: how we remember those we've lost, our understanding of love, and the tenacity of the heart.



SCOTT PILGRIM'S

PRECIOUS LITTLE LIFE



VOL.

1

BRYAN LEE O'MALLEY

"A HUGE
AMOUNT OF FUN"

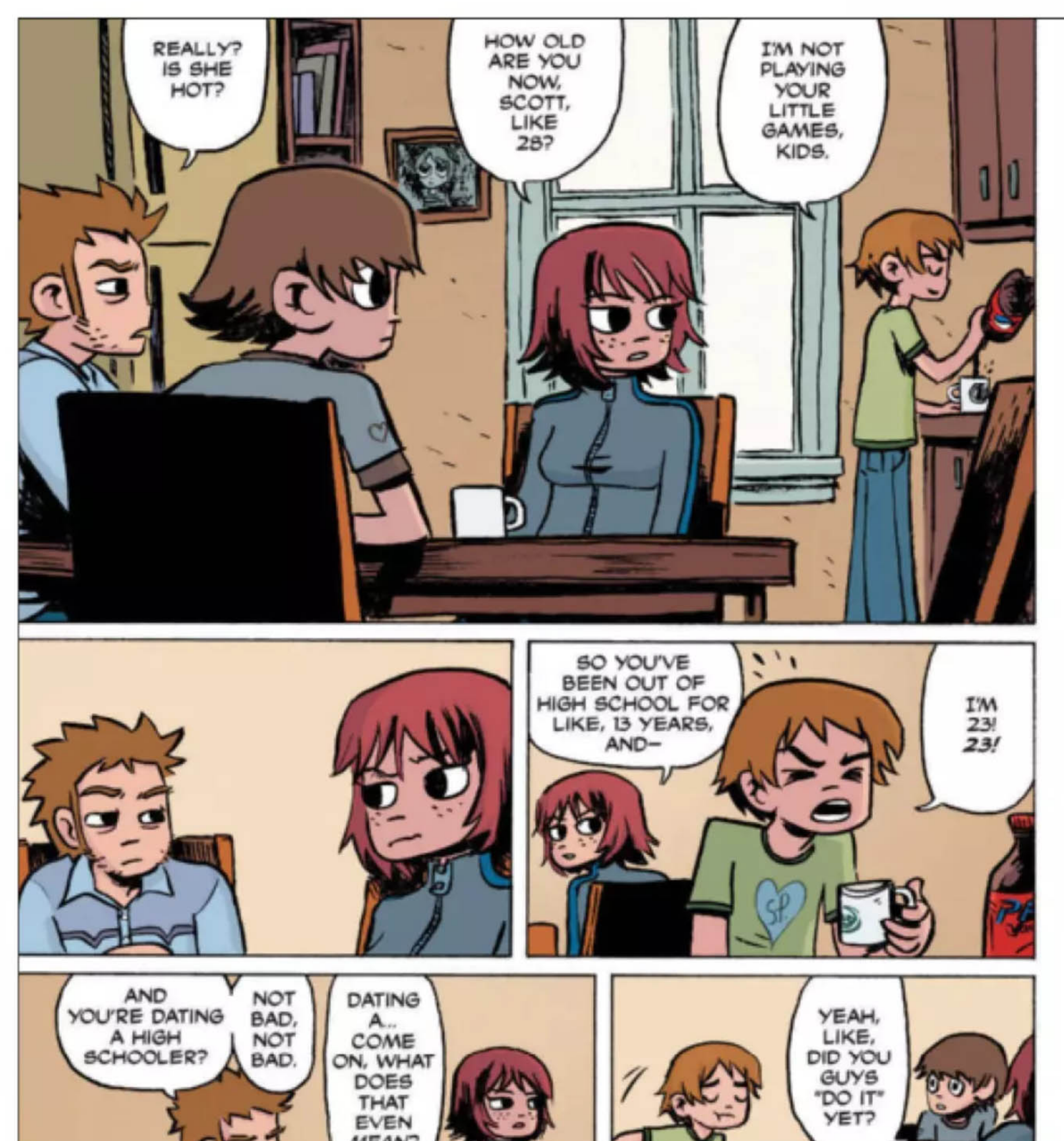
SCOTT PILGRIM'S PRECIOUS LITTLE LIFE: VOL 1

Details Originally published Scott Pilgrim (2004) **Publisher** Oni Press **Writer** Bryan Lee O'Malley
Artist Bryan Lee O'Malley **Collected in** Scott Pilgrim's Precious Little Life
Available digitally Comixology

Straight from Toronto and into the hearts of hipsters everywhere, Bryan Lee O'Malley's *Scott Pilgrim* is a glorious burst of energy, humour and heart. His manga-infused, hugely cinematic tale of an aimless 20-something struggling to come to terms with so many things about adulthood both rings true on an emotional level, and entertains purely as an outrageous action fantasy.

As Scott realises that he's going to have to fight Ramona Flowers' seven evil exes, O'Malley isn't afraid to show his hero's bad side. Scott is funny and good company, and we're certainly rooting for him, but that's partly because we see our own flaws in him. He can be uncaring and selfish, and he's got no idea how his actions affect other people.

Of course, there's the brilliant, massively energetic fight sequences that lend themselves to O'Malley's art style, the plethora of pop-culture references and ninjas. *Scott Pilgrim* is a huge amount of fun, but it's got an emotional intelligence that makes it resonate.



RUNAWAYS®



adrian02
NEWBOLD BR

RUNAWAYS: PRIDE & JOY

Details Originally published Runaways #1-6 (2003) **Publisher** Tsunami (Marvel) **Writer** Brian K Vaughan
Artist Adrian Alphona **Collected in** Runaways: Vol 1 - Pride & Joy (£9.99) **Available digitally** Comixology

When Marvel first approached writer Brian K Vaughan to create a book that teens and adults alike could enjoy, the comic-book community approached with trepidation. Titles that look to walk that delicate tightrope tend to fail, but *Runaways* quickly became an essential read within the wider Marvel universe.

Following a group of kids who discover their parents are secret supervillains, they promptly head out on the road to forge their own way in the world and discover their own superpowers. The result is a wonderfully fresh and modern take on the superhero genre. It takes the classic Marvel origin story – something the publisher has nailed after years of rebooting its core heroes – and wraps it in a fantastic coming-of-age story. *Runaways* is a contemporary take on the superhero genre; full of smart storytelling, beautiful art and snappy dialogue, making it a must-read for any superhero aficionado.

“RUNAWAYS QUICKLY BECAME AN ESSENTIAL READ”



TRANSMETROPOLITAN: YEAR OF THE BASTARD

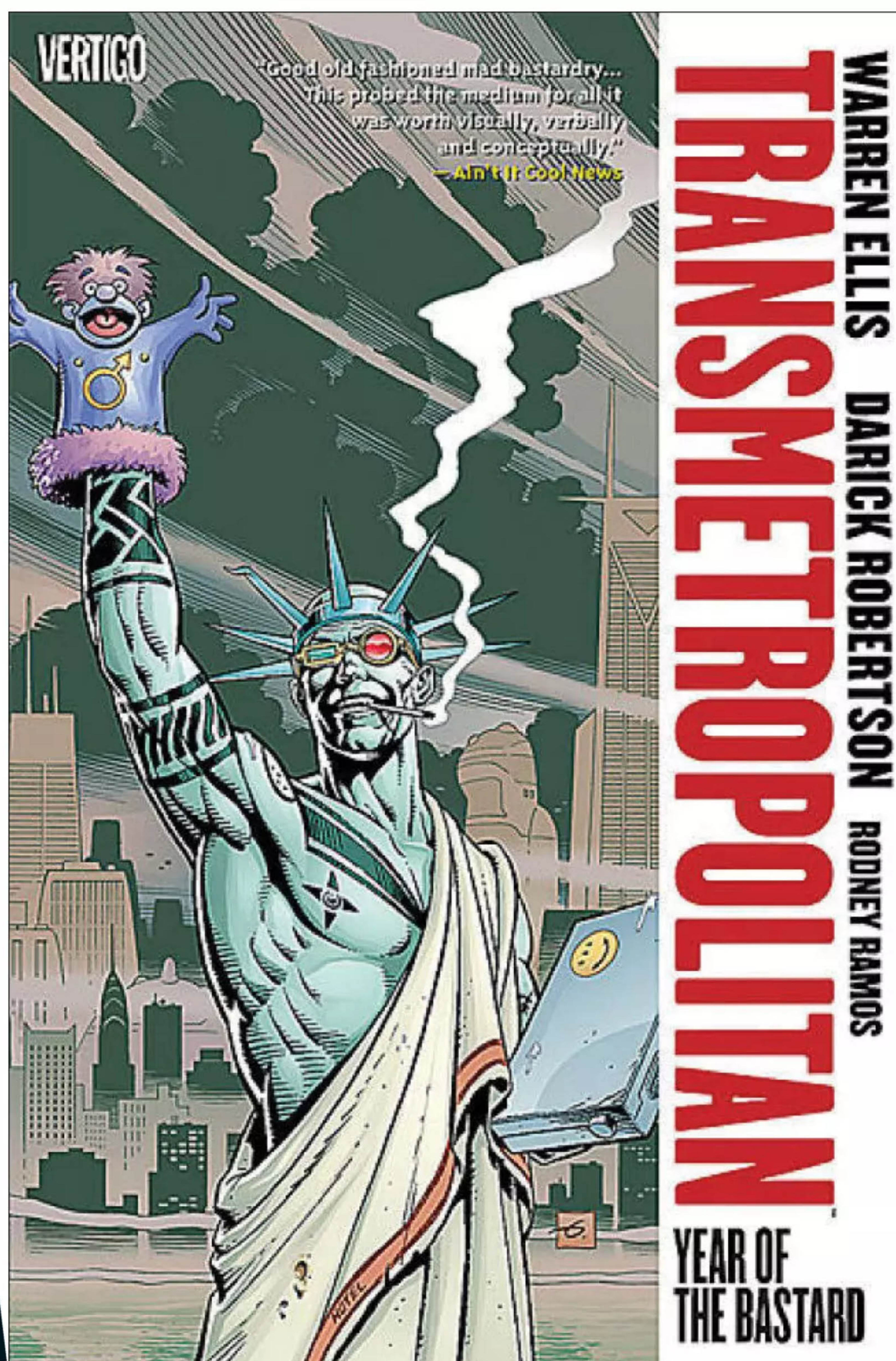
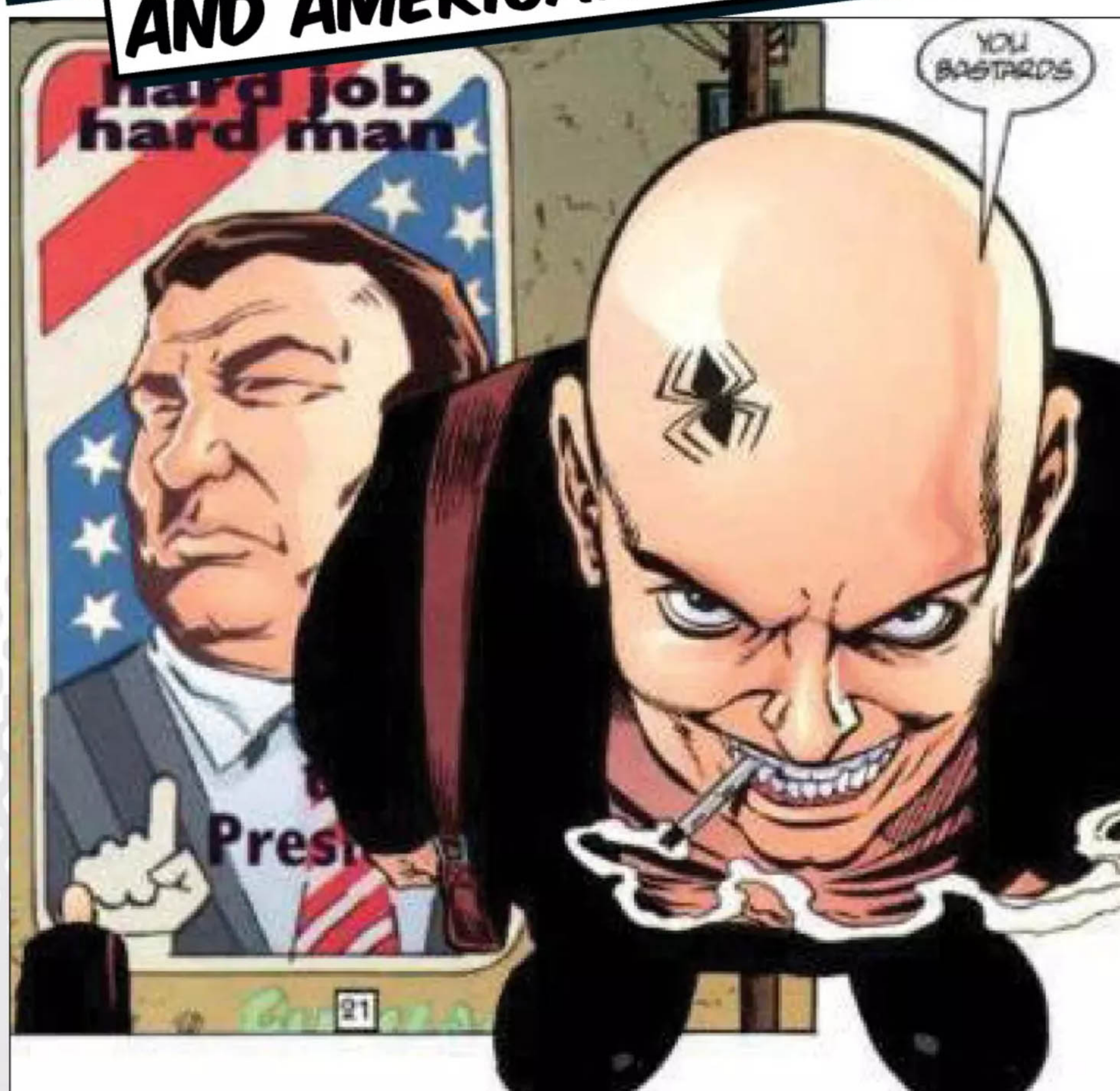
Details Originally published Transmetropolitan #13-18 (1998-99) **Publisher** DC/Vertigo
Writer Warren Ellis **Artist** Darick Robertson **Collected in** Transmetropolitan Vol 3: Year Of
 The Bastard **Available digitally** Comixology

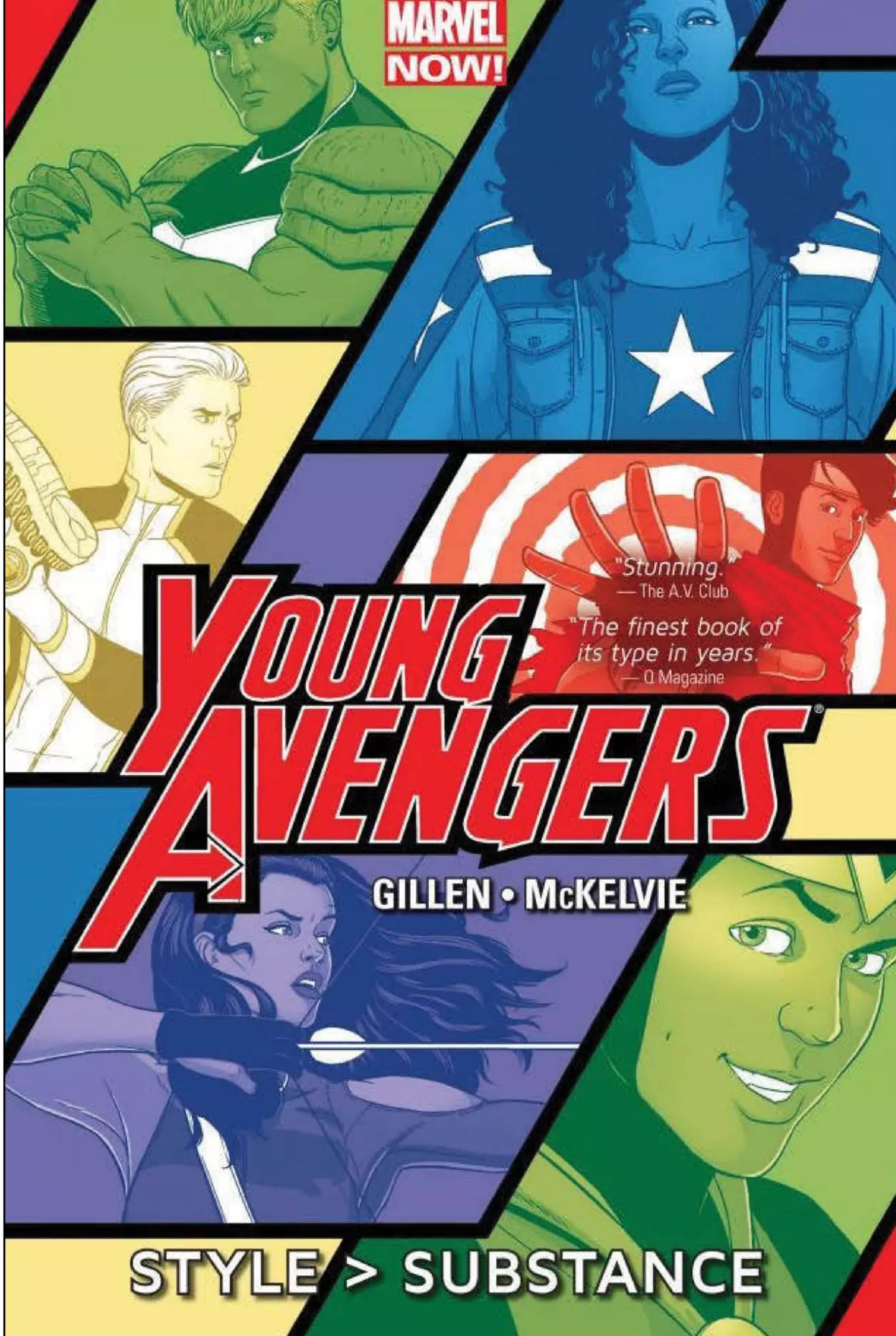
Transmetropolitan: Year Of The Bastard is a scathing indictment of both British and American politics set in a media-saturated future. It's not exactly circumspect about its criticism: first published in the wake of Tony Blair's election and Princess Diana's death, it features a Blair-alike candidate nicknamed 'The Smiler' and a publicly beloved political aide who wears her hair like Princess Leia.

In this collection, journalist Spider Jerusalem is caught in a tangle of cover-ups, genetic engineering and assassination when he covers the upcoming presidential election – that is, when he's not blacking out drunk or shooting drugs into his eyes. It all plays out against the backdrop of a society where TV and information invade every aspect of daily life, 24 hours a day.

Full of intrigue and uncomfortable truths, *Year Of The Bastard* suggests that being cynical about politics is simply seeing things for what they are.

**"A SCATHING
INDICTMENT OF BRITISH
AND AMERICAN POLITICS"**





YOUNG AVENGERS: STYLE > SUBSTANCE

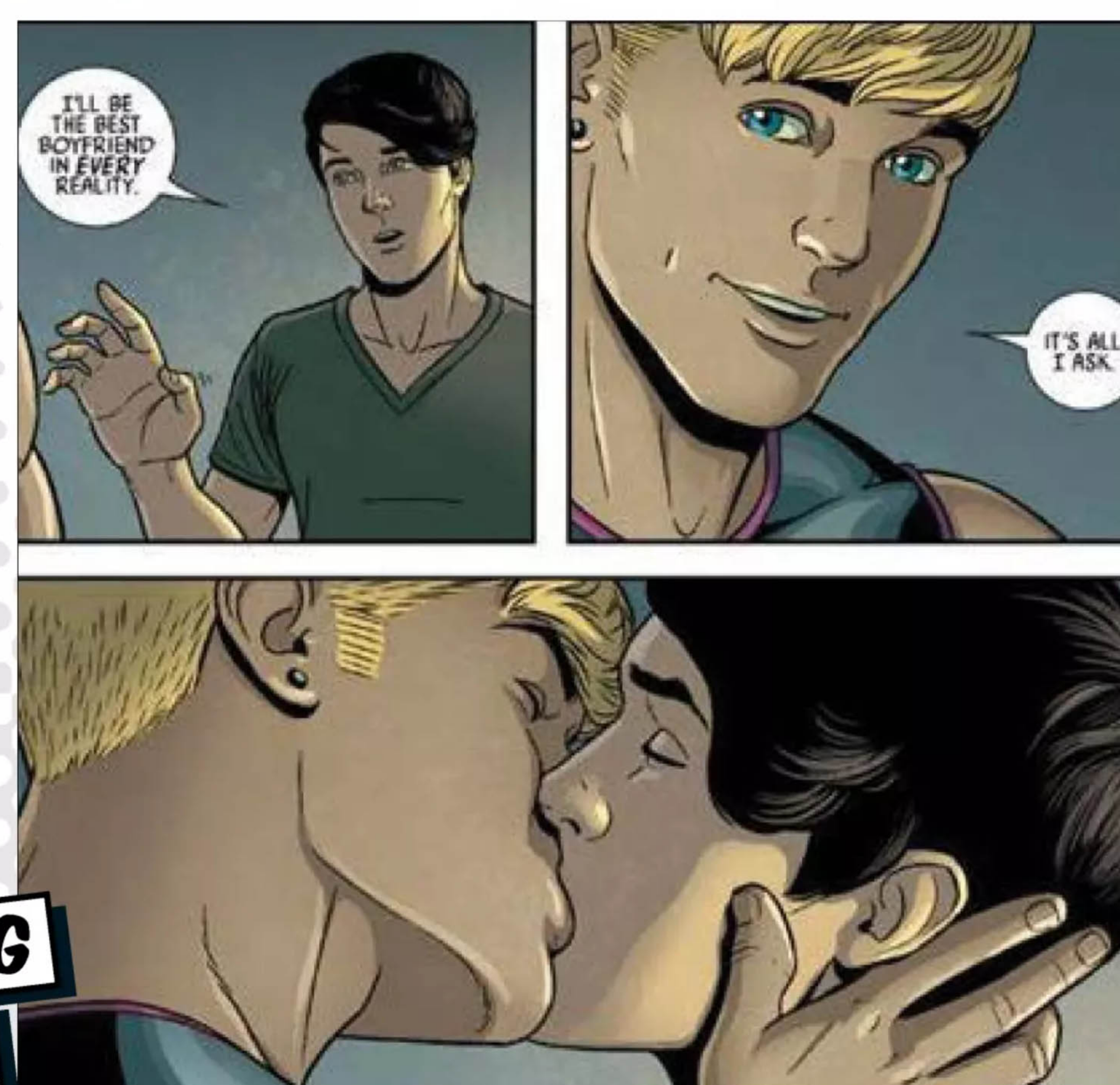
Details Originally published Young Avengers: Vol 2 - #1-5, Marvel Now! Point One #1
Publisher Marvel **Writer** Kieron Gillen **Artists** Jamie McKelvie, Matthew Norton
Collected in Young Avengers: Style > Substance **Available digitally** Comixology, Marvel

Young Avengers is more than just a superhero comic; it's a superhero comic committed to exploring its premise, which in this case is the joy and terror of adolescence.

It's not always subtle – the series' main villain is 'Mother', an extra-dimensional parasite who can turn adults against the Young Avengers – but the theme of trying to prove oneself against the enemy that is the adult population always rings true.

A lot of that truth comes from the characters' interactions. Teenage conversation is difficult to portray accurately, but Kieron Gillen manages it with ease – to the point where the series won a GLAAD award for its portrayal of Hulkling and Wiccan's romance.

McKelvie's expressive faces and body language, some jaw-dropping panel layouts, and Norton's exuberant colours combine with Gillen's deft writing in an explosion of youthful energy. The result is a comic that makes you feel like you could be young forever. It's tackling of various subjects that YA fiction like to skip around make it a fantastic read for all ages.





THE KIDS





ARE ALRIGHT

HOW MARVEL'S YOUNG AVENGERS BECAME THE BREAKOUT COMIC OF 2013

Marvel has always banked on young and flawed heroes, but 2013's *Young Avengers* have consistently kicked out and kicked ass. We learn the secret behind the formula from creators **Kieron Gillen** and **Jamie McKelvie**

The battle for the multiplex between Marvel and DC may have ceded the last round to Marvel, but it still rages in the racks. While DC helped regenerate sales back in 2011 with the new 52 – a revamp and relaunch to attract new readers – Marvel has kept that momentum going in the last few years with a constant rolling restart of titles new and old: Marvel NOW!

But Marvel has gone one step further than simply giving their books new first issues; creators have been given the freedom to push the boundaries of the medium in a way that the superhero genre has rarely dared in the past decade, and many titles are now earning critical plaudits alongside their indie cousins.

The new *Young Avengers*, revamped from the award-winning 2005 run, has been masterminded by Kieron Gillen and Jamie McKelvie, the British dynamic duo behind the cult hit *Phonogram*. While the title has always been renowned for its embrace

of diverse characters, with the original winning a GLAAD Award, Gillen and McKelvie have pushed this even further with multiple female, non-white, gay and bisexual characters.

In the opening pages of *Young Avengers* we see Kate Bishop, aka Hawkeye, awakening after a night of passion, and refusing to feel bad about herself for hopping into bed with a pretty boy. Was that a test to see what you could get away with in this series?

Kieron Gillen: The opening scene of *Young Avengers* is coded in that way, as in we knew what we wanted to say, we knew we were subverting, we knew what we were kicking against and we knew how we were doing it. Those opening seven pages I explicitly wrote as an overture: this is basically what we do, we do this quite ground-level with credible motions, we use a superhero metaphor to explore it, and we play around with the form.

And then we do something really kind of 'fuck you' and playfully 'fuck you', which is the big double page of obnoxiousness. If you don't like the first seven pages, you might as well drop the book.

We have a gay love triangle now, which was a good thing to do because it hadn't been done in mainstream superhero comics. *Young Avengers*, as carefully planned as it is, feels very natural.

***Young Avengers* is a very diverse book in a very genuine way, which really sets it apart from many of its rivals. What was your thinking there, and was there any resistance to it?**

Gillen: It's weird, we do OK on diversity. With *Young Avengers*, some of it is really weird, cold, hard maths, because you look at it and you realise who you could use. Billy and Teddy, there's so much narrative weight behind them. Actually, that's an immediate diversity problem – that was the two gay guys, they're also two white guys, and that caused a problem in terms of cold, hard diversity numbers, but my approach is always the story first.

I knew I wanted a cast of seven people, so my first thought on seeing the list of teams was "We probably need more gay people on this team" in that kind of way that if you have one gay character, it doesn't mean a story about that. You need at least two male characters interested in men in a book to be a romance, and if you want to do anything more complicated than that, as in a traditional romance or setting up a love triangle-type thing, you need more, in which case you've got three guys on the team. Then, of course, it alters the books' demographics to not have enough women in, arguably.

I much prefer diversity when it's for something, I'm much more interested in the fact that diversity should mean more diverse stories as well. The surface level ➤



Young Avengers has taken a line-up largely comprising rehashes of existing characters, and turned it into something exciting and new.

➤ diversity, while I think it's useful and interesting and in lots of ways it's something I do think about, I don't think that's the most important thing.

You have Miss America Chavez, wearing the US flag colours as a person of colour, and her attitude ties into the idea of the Young Avengers being a group rather than a team...

Jamie McKelvie: It's quite deliberate. We talked about how the last decade was superheroes as paramilitary, and I'm not sure we're interested in that anymore.

Gillen: I think we're just trying something else.

Did you get freedom to design the costumes, and obviously get them approved?

McKelvie: Basically, Kieron wrote that opening five pages as a test as much as anything else. I was the same, that if I can't redesign the characters then I'm not interested in doing this, and I had a list in order of priority of who needed what changes, and generally they were like, "Yep, fine."

Gillen: For all we talk about how our comics aren't particularly literal and we're quite into the metaphors and all that, our aesthetic in terms of what people wear is actually very grounded. We don't have characters wearing heels, because it doesn't fit the way our comic-books feel, and there are certainly more unrealistic comics who have gone for that, and it's like a musical; it's not meant to be real, we never quite buy that. There's definitely parts of the paramilitary ethos that we kind of get into, but we're using it for different means.

The comic has had a massively positive response, and it's interesting that there are so many fans on non-comic niche places like Tumblr.

Gillen: We want to make a book which isn't openly offensive to large numbers of people. Accessibility is our thing. Even if we were pandering, even if we were doing all this, wouldn't it be nice if there was one book that did that? Just one? And we don't believe we're doing that at all. It's something we just think is fun, which we've tried to actually welcome and it's like... if

The team's latest line-up represents diversity in a way few comics attempt.



TEAM TITANS

Meet Gillen and McKelvie's groundbreaking Young Avengers

KID LOKI

REAL NAME: LOKI LAUFFEYSON/IT'S COMPLICATED
FIRST APPEARANCE: THOR #617 (2011)
POWERS: GENIUS TRICKSTER AND MAGICAL MAESTRO REINCARNATED

This is both the old Loki we fear, and the new Loki we... fear too. Loveable on the outside, a terrifying mystery on the inside.

WICCAN

REAL NAME: BILLY KAPLAN
FIRST APPEARANCE: YOUNG AVENGERS #1 (2005)
POWERS: REALITY WARPING, POTENTIALLY THE MOST POWERFUL CHARACTER IN THE MARVEL UNIVERSE

Our lead character in many ways, Billy has many burdens to carry, and a trickster out to steal his power.

HAWKEYE

REAL NAME: KATE BISHOP
FIRST APPEARANCE: YOUNG AVENGERS #1 (2005)
POWERS: NONE

Also appearing in the Hawkeye series, Kate is the only non-powered member, but she is a master archer and a natural leader.

HULKLING

REAL NAME: TEDDY ALTMAN
FIRST APPEARANCE: YOUNG AVENGERS #1 (2005)
POWERS: SHAPESHIFTER, INCREASED STRENGTH AND HEALING, SWEETIE PIE

Boyfriend to Billy and longing to go back to the superhero life he once led. Unflinchingly loyal.

MISS AMERICA

REAL NAME: AMERICA CHAVEZ
FIRST APPEARANCE: VENGEANCE #1 (2011)
POWERS: INTERDIMENSIONAL DOOR KICKER, FLIGHT, INVULNERABILITY, A COMPLETE MYSTERY
She takes names, kicks ass, and saves the day, but America is a mystery wrapped in an enigma – an ass-kicking enigma, at that.

MARVEL BOY

REAL NAME: NOH-VARR
FIRST APPEARANCE: MARVEL BOY #1 (2000)
POWERS: SUPERHUMAN STRENGTH, SPEED, AGILITY, DURABILITY... SUPERHUMAN BASICALLY
An alien boy in love with Earth, particularly girl groups of the Sixties. Effortlessly gorgeous and effortlessly cool.



The love triangle involving Prodigy and Hulkling (above) and Wiccan is central to the story.

someone is really old, trust me, you were a teenager once, and if you're not interested in another human being – well, that's your problem. If you can't actually empathise with some interesting teenagers, you're a fucking idiot. They're people, don't patronise them.

Especially in *Young Avengers*, there are some characters reaching their early 20s, working dead-end jobs, and I think that *Young Avengers* is really about [being] transitional. It's not just about being 18; it's about being 18 to 21. It's about that transitional stage. But the people that love it genuinely love it.

McKelvie: You get Gif sets made of it in the first hour of it coming out. The reaction has been great, with fan-art and people who like it really like it, and that's good; that's what we want to see.

With *Young Avengers*, there's a sense of trying to push comics forward and experimenting within the superhero genre.

McKelvie: We certainly want to do something different.

Gillen: We have these rules where we never repeat an idea. We talk about experiments, but if we did a *We3* pastiche, we'd do it once and it wouldn't come back. And that forces us to try and create our grammar from scratch. Our idea is that if the Marvel universe started in 2013, how could their comics look?

And in some ways this is a traditional Marvel comic in terms of this being a super-heroic metaphor for teenagers; and that's Spider-Man, with a mixture of normality and fantasy, and normality to ground fantasy and the fantasy to transfer. One of the core wonders of superhero comics is the transforming

of the world you live in, and the interesting thing about the urban fantasy is the idea of repopulating the area that you live in and re-imagining it. It's kind of like what parkour does physically and superhero comics does mentally, and we kind of lean into that. That sounded like I knew what I was talking about for a second!

McKelvie: Almost.

Gillen: I was making it up as I went along. I didn't know where it was going.

McKelvie: Much like our comics.



Writer Kieron Gillen admits that the series won't appeal to everyone.

“IF YOU DON'T LIKE THE FIRST SEVEN PAGES, YOU MIGHT AS WELL DROP THE BOOK” KIERON GILLEN

The two of you have a very tight collaboration process, with a lot of back and forth...

Gillen: On occasion I'll show Jamie the script beforehand and we'll talk about stuff...

McKelvie: Yeah, to just have it bubbling away in the back of my head as I draw the previous issue. But it's kind of what we've always done, like we worked together for... well, we met ten years ago, so we pretty much worked together for ten years. And that's pretty much how we've always worked: back and forth, even when I lived in one place, Kieron lived in another place...

Gillen: Now we live in the same place.

McKelvie: Now we live in the same place. Like Bert and Ernie. No, but we live in the same place.

Gillen: Some people do think that, and I don't like disappointing them. I say, “Yep, we share a bed.”

McKelvie: We're constantly talking back and forth about what we're working on, so even if it is not officially emails back and forth, we're always constantly...

Gillen: ... In dialogue.

McKelvie: On every bit of the book, really. That's just the way we work.

The December and January issues were published just a week apart across the New Year, and they were centred on something akin to an after-party for all the young Marvel stars, which is possibly just an excuse to squeeze in your favourite characters...

Gillen: It was cameos, because it's more about the optical resolution, and it's set on this one night, at the New Year's party and it came out the week before and after New Year's. That's really quite an old-school comic idea, like it's the Christmas issue, we rarely get a chance to do synchronicity and with us, the

fact that we tried to fill this year, it feels really good that the last issue of the season comes out... we rarely get a chance to make statement like that, and we have.

And I want to bring all the kids together. *Young Avengers* is kind of my love song to these doomed young people in the Marvel universe, and getting them all together and having a lovely party the night before every year that they've survived strikes me as a kind of doomed and romantic thing.

You guys obviously care a lot about this comic in particular, and are very attached to it. But at some point you might finish, and someone else might take over. Is that hard to deal with?

McKelvie: You've got to have that mental space, but also we very much wanted to pretend it was our own book.

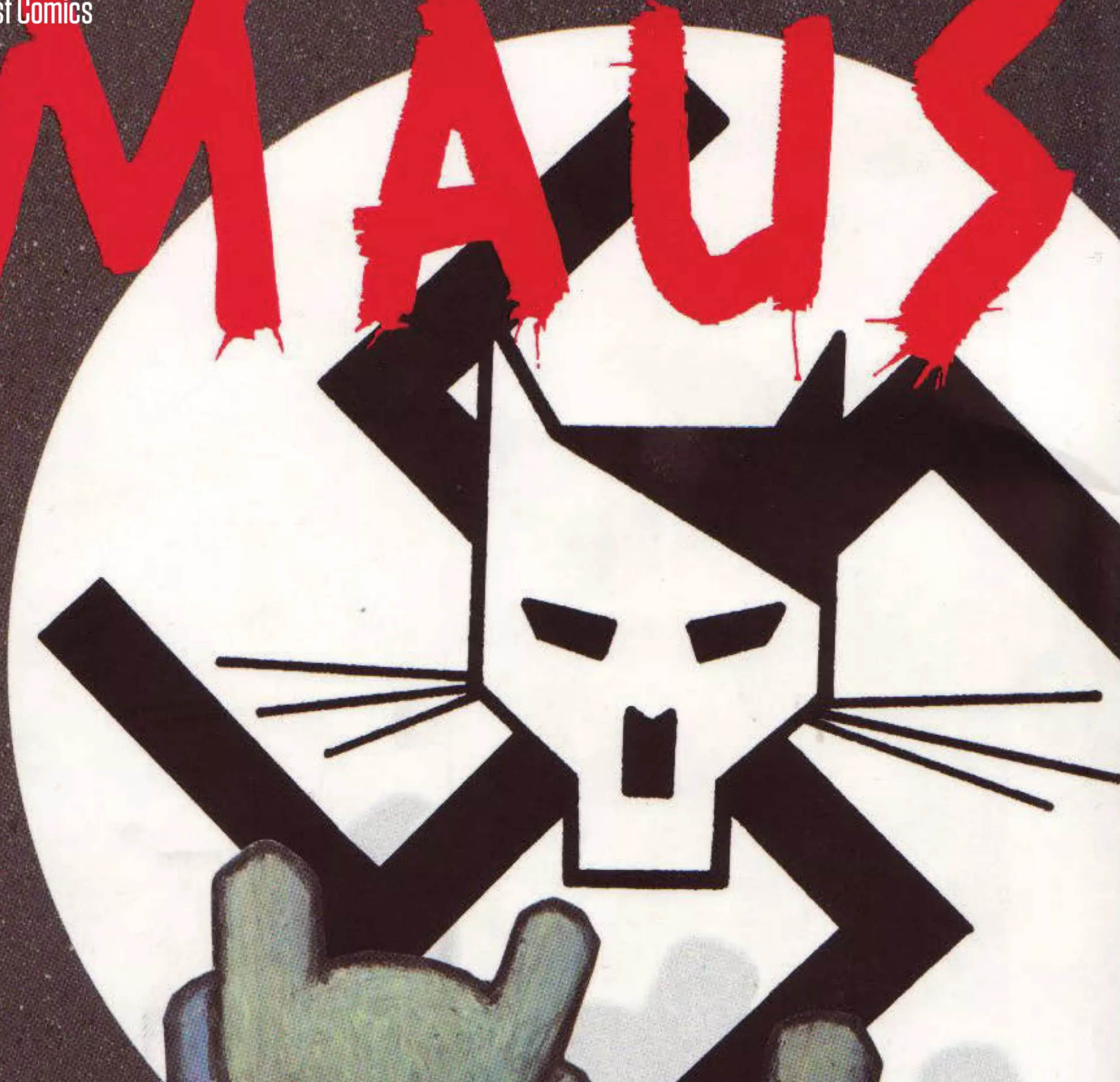
Gillen: If you get me to write a book, it pretty much owns a big part of my mind as long as I'm doing it, and I cried over *Journey Into Mystery* and all this kind of thing, so this is going to be fundamentally distressing for me to do.

On the other hand, it's a job, so it's kind of that double thing. ‘Write it as your own’ was always our kind of way. There's one thing I haven't got over with Marvel, and Jamie hasn't either: the singular statement of ‘Here is how we think comics can be’. [*Young Avengers*] is a book about delusions and optimism, and that's the kind of approach that has passed over to the creators. ☺

Young Avengers Volume 1: Style > Substance is available now from Panini, while the ongoing series is available monthly from all good comic shops, or digitally from the Comixology app.

THE COMPLETE

MAUS



WINNER
OF THE
PULITZER
PRIZE

art spiegelman

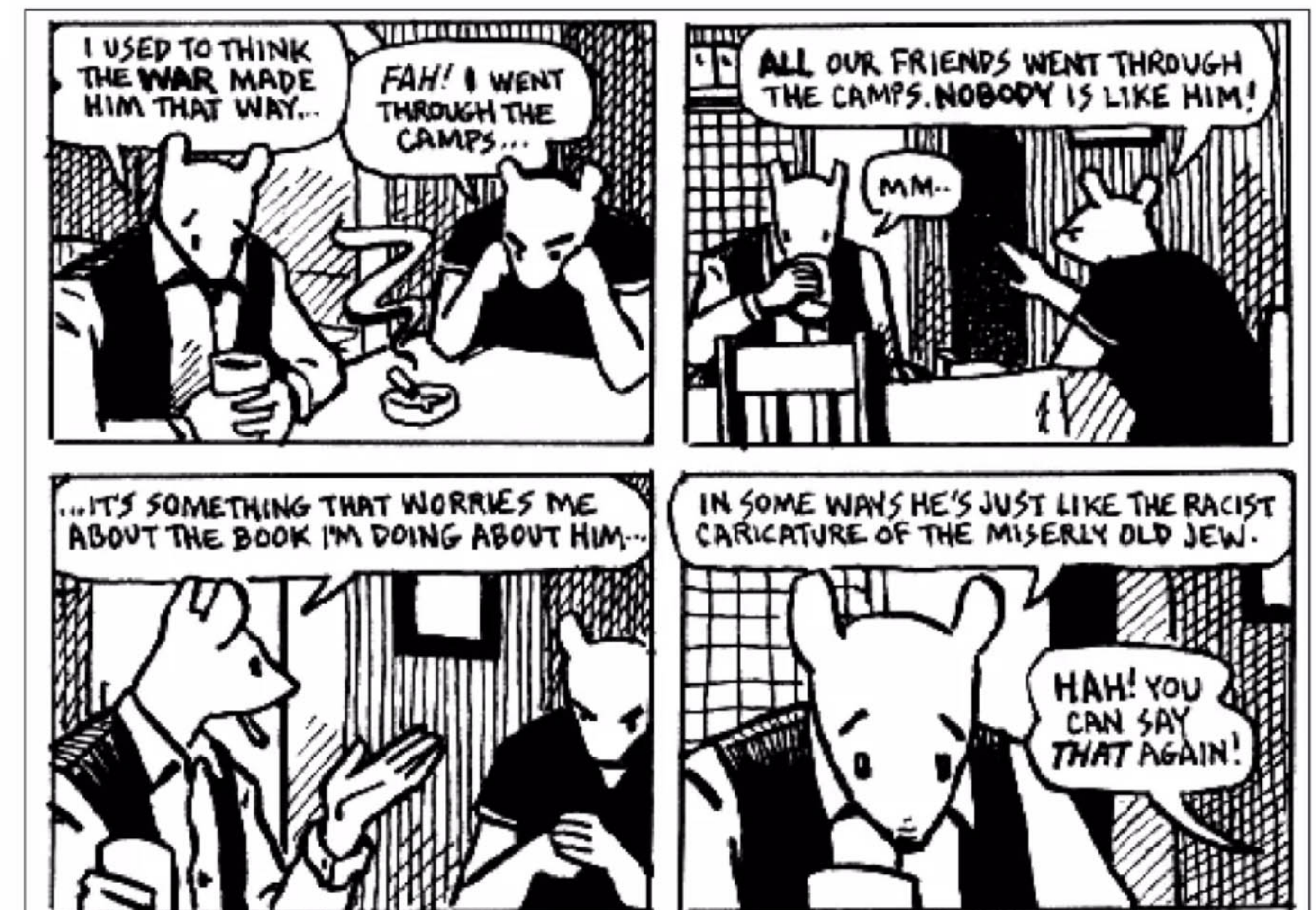
MAUS

Details Originally published Maus (1980-91) **Publisher** Raw Books & Graphics/Penguin Books (original), Pantheon Books (graphic novel) **Writer** Art Spiegelman **Artist** Art Spiegelman **Collected in** Maus
Available digitally Penguin

Maus is often described as one of the greatest graphic novels of all time, and rightly so. Its depiction of what Spiegelman's Jewish parents suffered during the Holocaust examines in heart-rending depth how we relate to the people who make our histories.

Spiegelman uses animal masks to denote different people groups – for instance, the Jews wear mouse masks, while the Nazis wear cat masks – suggesting that national, ethnic and religious uniformity is somewhat artificial, raising the question of whether any history can be shared. Meanwhile, Spiegelman struggles to reconcile his respect for his father's refusal to be defeated with the frustration he feels towards him in everyday life.

Maus's excellence lies in these conflicts, exploring the nature of collective identity and the burden of history in a way that no other graphic novel does.



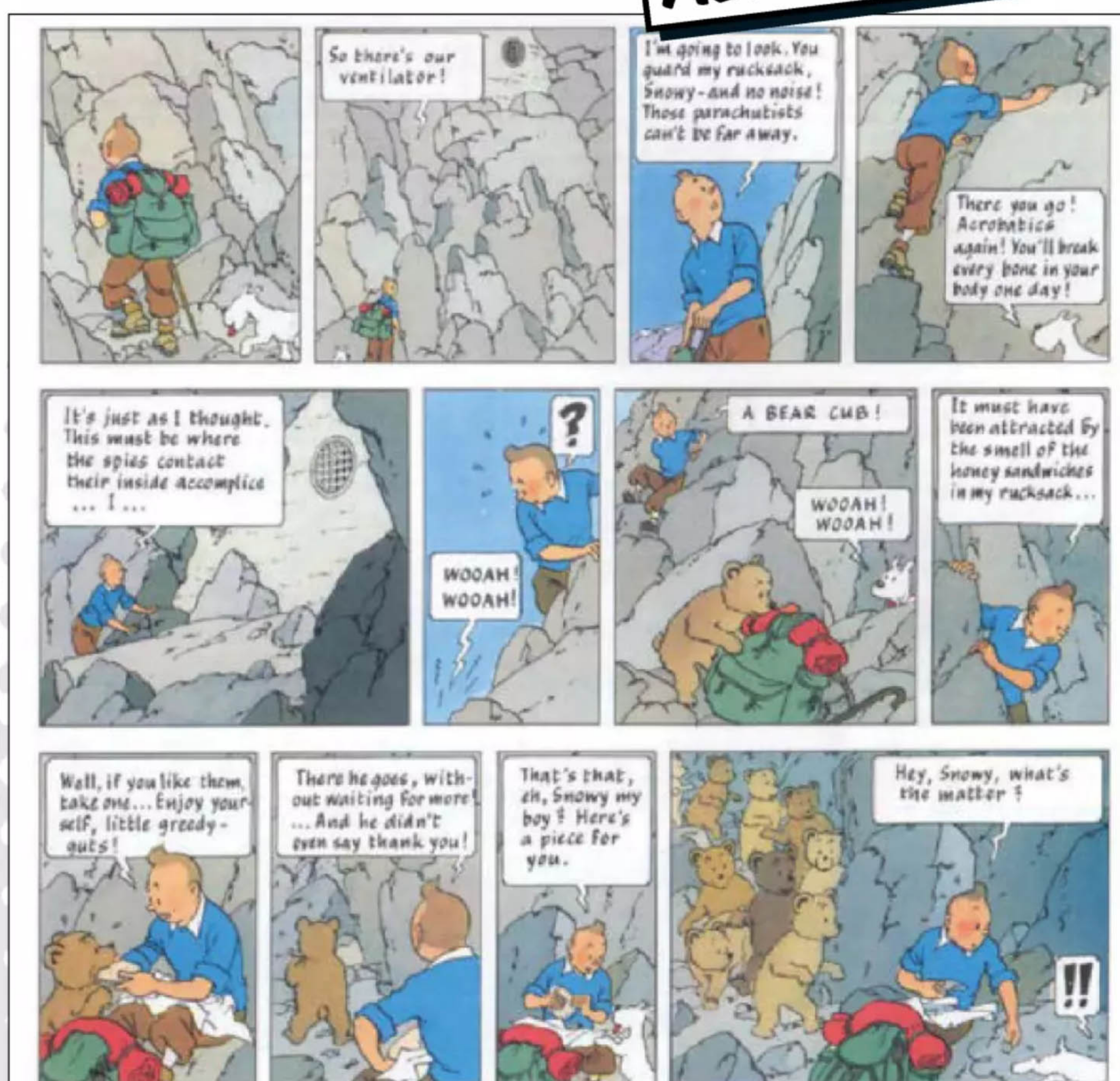
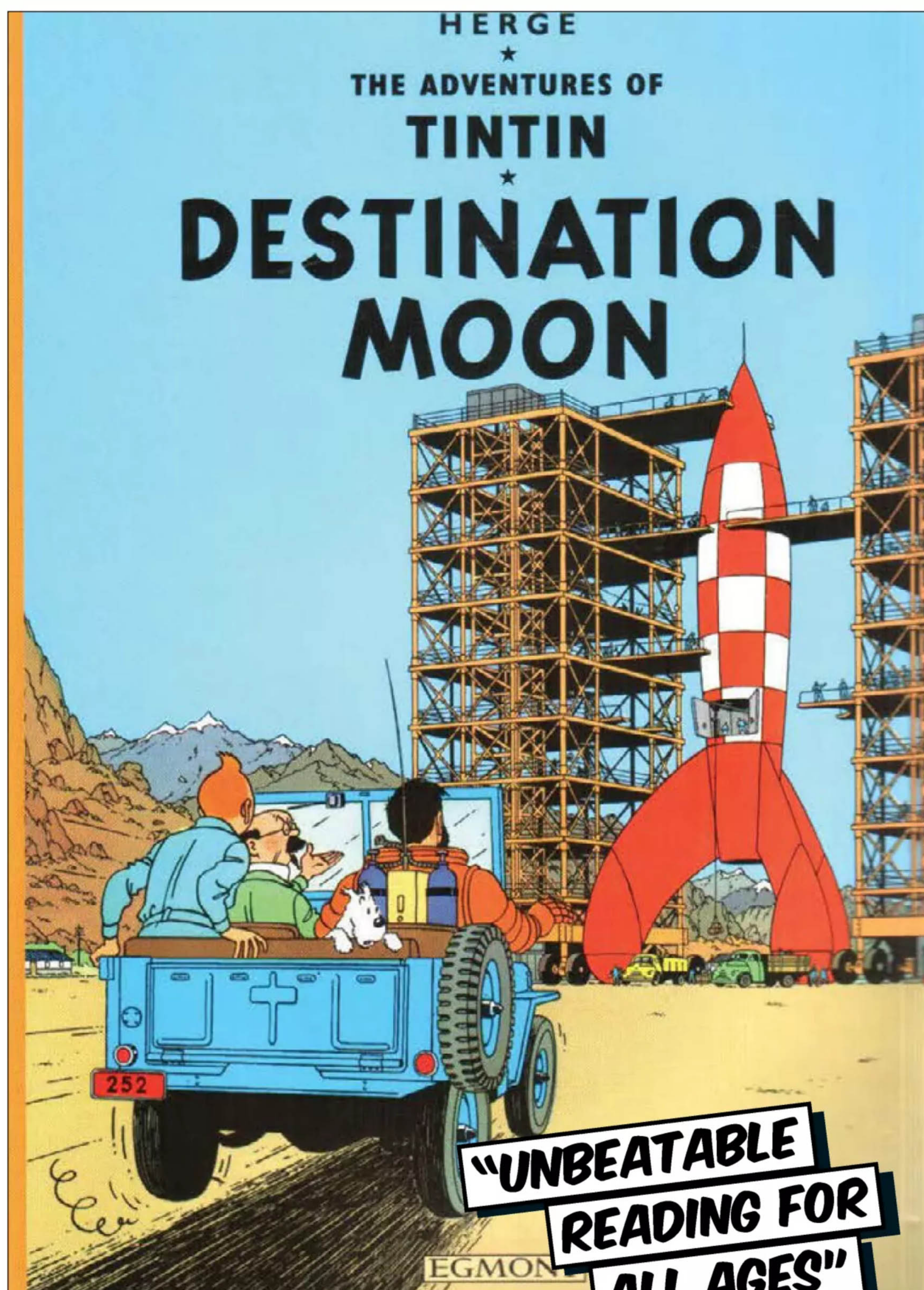
TINTIN: DESTINATION MOON

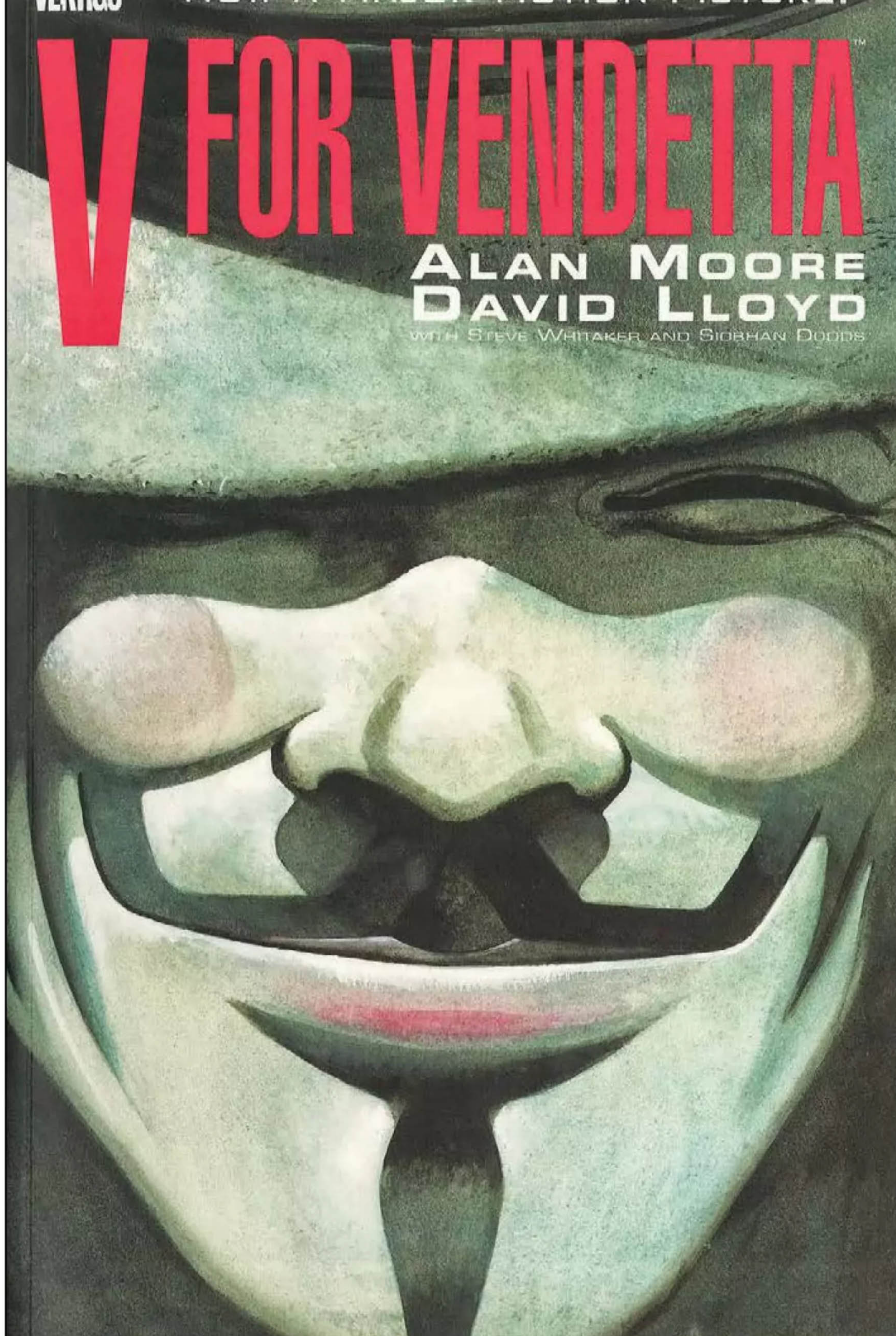
Details Originally published Tintin Magazine (1950-52) **Publisher** Casterman, Egmont **Writer** Hergé **Artist** Hergé **Collected in** The Adventures Of Tintin: Destination Moon (£7.99) **Available digitally** The Adventures Of Tintin app by Moulinsart (iTunes)

Everyone knows of Tintin, yet few who miss out as a child realise just what they have truly missed. Hergé's series of masterpieces is unbeatable reading for all ages, and while a few of the earlier episodes are somewhat problematic, there is no excuse not to start reading today.

While the series is famous for its clean-line signature style, what really appeals are the number of genres on offer: fantasy, mystery, sci-fi, political thriller, adventure, and more. The exceedingly well-researched (for the most part) stories have a decent amount of slapstick humour dashed in, which works well with the cartoonish characters set in their realistic backgrounds.

Destination Moon is a fantastic starting point, written 19 years before the Apollo 11 Moon landing, it's a showcase of brilliant imagination and forward-thinking. Followed by *Explorers On The Moon*, the two-book story follows Tintin, Snowy and Captain Haddock as they join renowned scientist Professor Calculus while he prepares to fly a rocket to the Moon. The adventure is intertwined with an espionage sub-plot, and is a joy to read.





V FOR VENDETTA

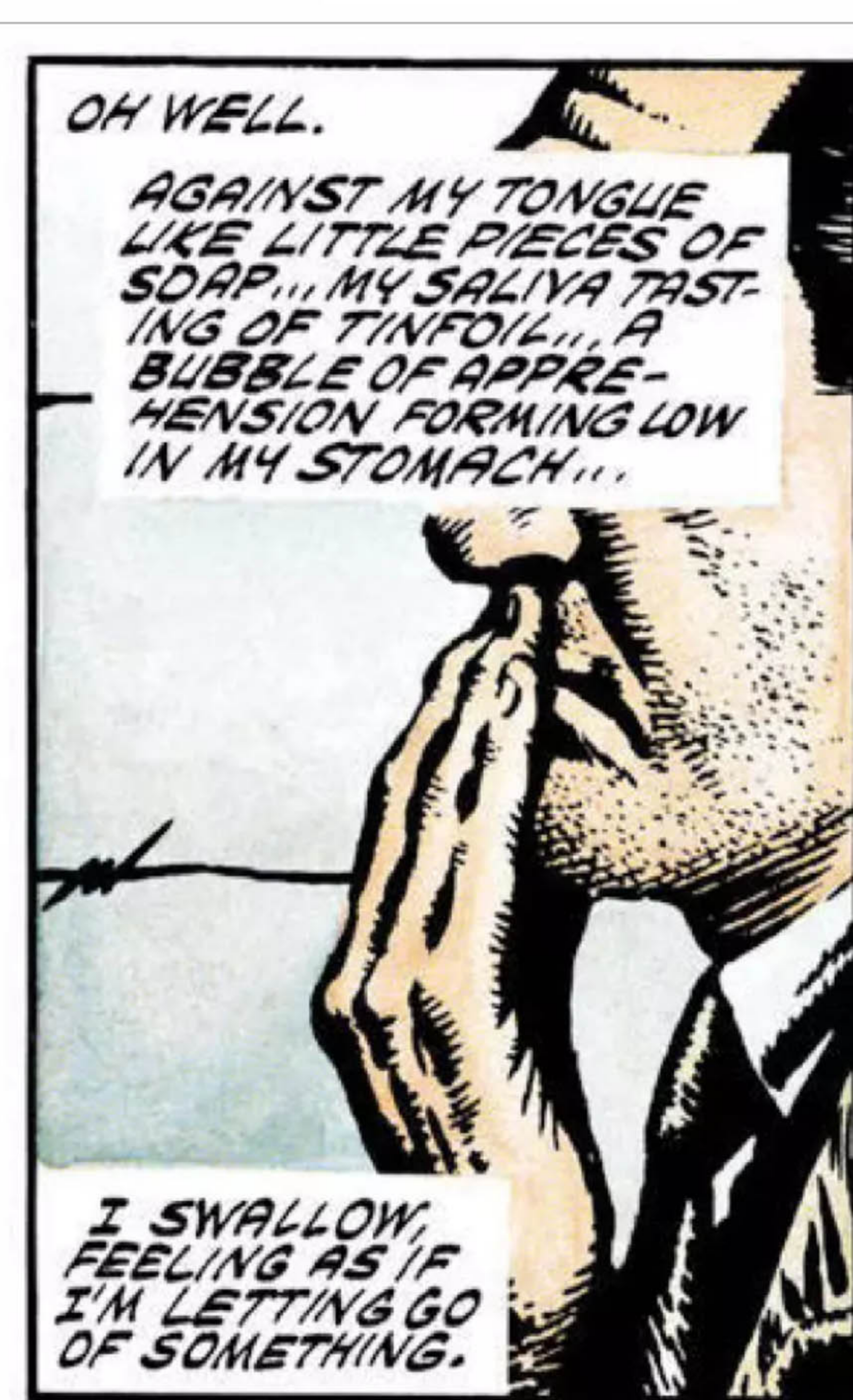
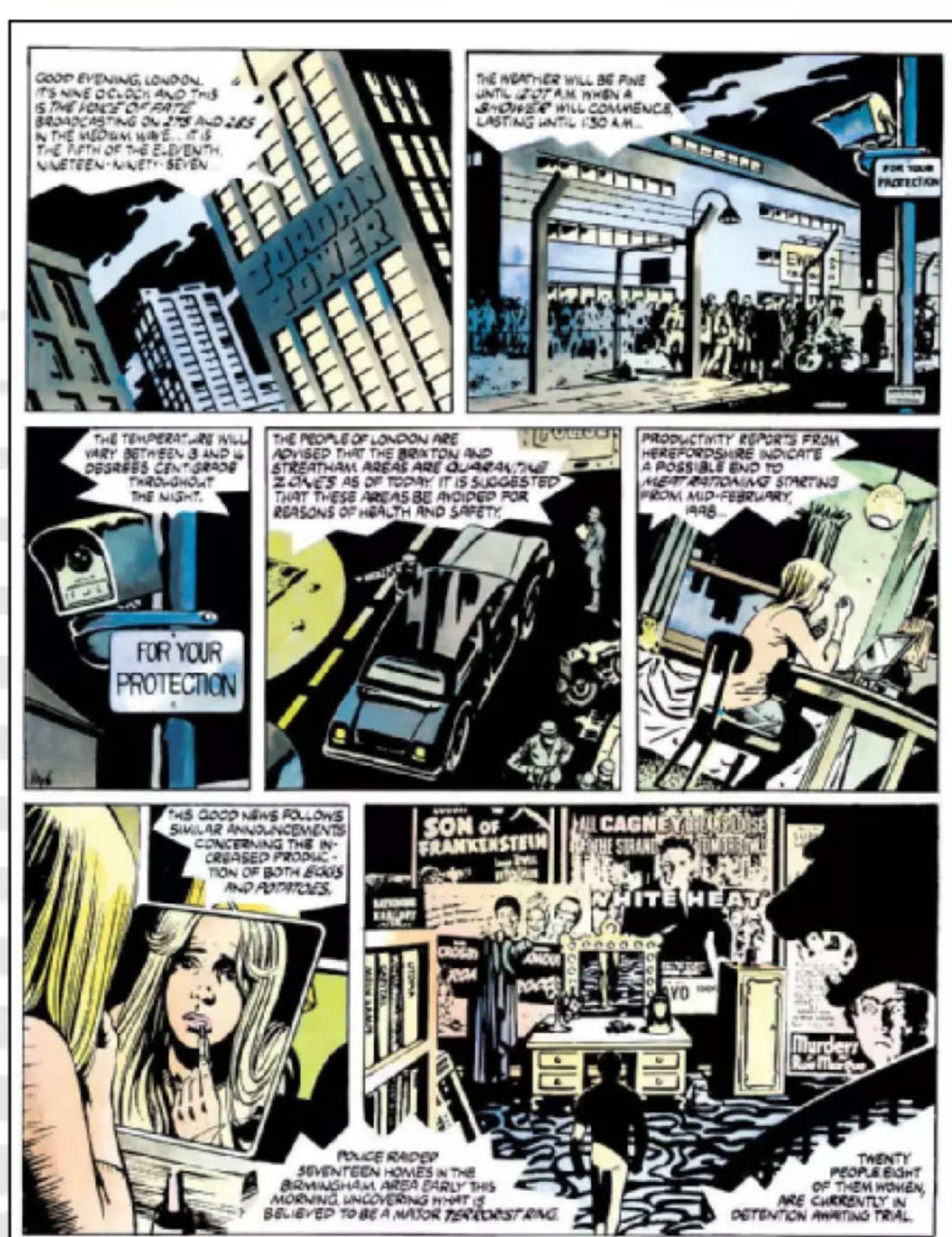
Details Originally published V For Vendetta #1-10 (1982-89)
Publisher Vertigo/DC **Writer** Alan Moore **Artist** David Lloyd
Collected in V For Vendetta **Available digitally** Comixology, iBookstore

“Behind this mask there is more than just flesh,” says titular protagonist V in his defining speech to Evey Hammond – the co-starring everyman. “Beneath this mask there is an idea. And ideas are bulletproof.”

Alan Moore isn’t scared of confronting the social norms that we accept in Western society and dissecting them in stories that highlight the ridiculous and champion the understated. His retelling of the Guy Fawkes story has, as such, inspired a whole generation, to the extent that activist group Anonymous has taken his mask as its symbol: a potent reflection of V’s motives.

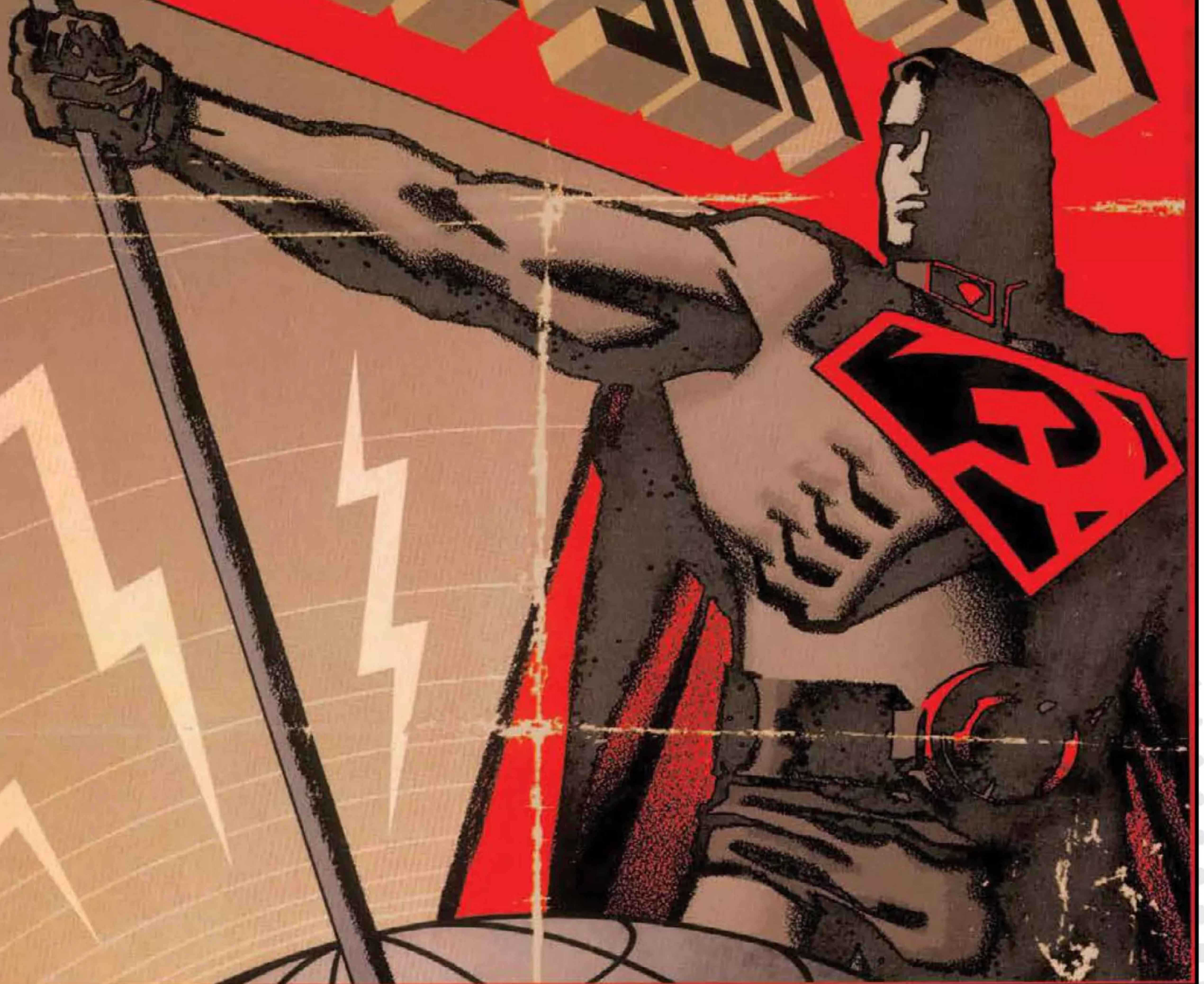
V For Vendetta was Moore’s first foray into multiple narrative threads and dense verbose storytelling – a feature of his writing that would come to define his career. While this can make the novel feel bloated, David Lloyd’s art helps break up the prose and punctuate Moore’s graphic metaphors with style and historical relevance.

“INSPIRED A WHOLE GENERATION”



"One of the best stories in the
history of the Man of Steel."

— IGN



MARK MILLAR DAVE JOHNSON KILIAN PLOUKETT

SUPERMAN: RED SON

Details Originally published Superman: Red Son #1-3 (2003) **Publisher** DC **Writer** Mark Millar

Artists Dave Johnson, Kilian Plunkett **Collected in** Superman: Red Son **Available digitally** Comixology, Kindle

While Mark Millar is somewhat of a love-him-or-hate-him writer, the work he created while under the wing of Grant Morrison remains something rather special.

Superman: Red Son, released under DC's experimental and critically acclaimed Elseworlds imprint, explored the 'what if' scenario of Superman being raised in the Soviet Union rather than good ol' Kansas.

With just a few hours dictating the geographic location of the landing, Superman lands in the Ukraine. Thanks to this twist of fate, instead of growing up to fight for truth, justice and the American way, he instead becomes the champion of the common worker and, of course, Stalin himself. As the Man of Steel slowly realises the error of his ways, the reader also sees events unfolding in an increasingly fractured United States as CIA agent James Olsen recruits genius scientist Lex Luthor to protect their country in the face of the Soviet alien threat.

Perhaps one of the most interesting Superman stories ever written, with a great number of intriguing themes and plot machinations that require several re-reads, this is a must for any comics reader – whether you're a Superman fan or not.



HELLBOY



SEED *of* DESTRUCTION

MIKE MIGNOLA • JOHN BYRNE

Details Originally published Hellboy #1-4 (1994) **Publisher** Dark Horse **Writer** Mike Mignola **Artist** Mike Mignola
Collected in Hellboy: Vol 1 - Seed Of Destruction **Available digitally** N/A

Mignola's abstract artwork and horror from of the HP Lovecraft king gives *Hellboy* a wickedly distinctive style, not to mention some of comics' most entertaining story arcs. It all starts here though, and it's a great introduction to Hellboy's assault on Nazis, monsters and everything that could possibly go bump in the night. We won't lie, *Hellboy* stories can get pretty bizarre, but that's all part of Mignola's charm. *Seed Of Destruction* will introduce you to a chaotic reality, one that you'll never be able to release yourself from.





INTERVIEW

Mike Mignola

We talk to Mike Mignola about his entry into the comics industry, the creation of Hellboy, adapting comics for the big screen, and how it feels to get to “draw monsters for a living”

What first got you excited about the world of comics?

My cousin was a comic-book reader, and he introduced me to great old Marvel comics – stuff by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby. The bug hit me that there was this whole world, a whole mythology, I was unaware of.

What inspired you to go from being a fan to working in the industry?

From an early age, fuelled by comics and the books I was reading, I loved the supernatural. As I went through art school, my goal was to make a living drawing monsters, but there aren't many jobs doing that! Gearing myself towards becoming an illustrator, I started looking at comics again as a place where I could get away with drawing monsters. I didn't think I was good enough to draw comics, but thought that by getting in there, inking other people's work, I'd eventually get a job drawing covers or something. It never occurred to me to write my own stories at that point.

What exactly prompted you to start scripting then?

After ten years in the business, drawing a lot of stuff that didn't have monsters in it, I realised the only way I was going to get to draw the stuff I wanted to draw was to make it up myself. I co-wrote a Batman story – basically: here's a list of the things I wanna draw – and it was fun. I then thought that instead of making up weird stories and sticking established characters into them, why not make up my own characters, specifically for these kinds of supernatural stories?

And this is when Hellboy was born?

Yeah. I knew the stories and subject matter I wanted to do, and so it was just a matter of making up a character to base stories around. Hellboy isn't a character I'd planned to do; I just wanted a cult detective character. I'd have made him

a regular human being, except I knew I'd get bored drawing that, and so I thought of making a fun monster my main character.

Hellboy stories contain mythology, horror and fantasy elements. Where does your inspiration for these things come from?

Well, the first few *Hellboy* books are an explosion – everything and the kitchen sink is thrown in there, because who knew how long I was going to get a chance to do this? So they include everything I ever wanted to draw: pulp magazine horror stories, B-movies, Victorian-era ghost stories... Basically, everything I'd ever seen was the inspiration for the first *Hellboy*!

Later, I gravitated towards folklore – something I've loved since I was a kid. In fact, I'd originally planned on doing straight adaptations of folklore tales, but I realised once I'd done *Hellboy*, and that people liked it, I could do the same stories, but use Hellboy as a device to get people to read them. Straight adaptations of folklore tales would narrow the audience tremendously, but Hellboy, despite being beast of the apocalypse, has an 'everyman' appeal that readers can relate to.

What appeals to you about folklore?

I love the element of the absurd. Stuff happens where you go: “Wow! There's no way I'd have made that up!” You don't know why something works or happens, but the beauty is that it just does. For some reason, someone made up a story where Russian witch Baba Yaga sneaks into a guy's house each night to count his silverware. God knows why! But there's some other logic going on, which I refer to as ‘fairy tale logic’ – a kind of strangeness I find endlessly fascinating.

One of the most important things in supernatural fiction is having an element where we don't understand why things are happening, because once we do, they become science fiction.

And, ironically, you use a demon, Hellboy, to keep the things grounded!

There's a schizophrenic nature to writing *Hellboy*. I listen to a lot of Shakespeare and Bible films, and I have a tendency to write dialogue in that kind of rhythm, especially when dealing with bad guys. After writing a couple of pages of that, I become embarrassed by what I'm doing. Hellboy is the part of me that's my father's son – he'll say, “What the hell are you doing?” and let the reader know that I know the other thing is kind of silly. It's a formula that's worked well. *Hellboy* has my sensibilities, some of my sense of humour, but also my father's real blue-collar working stiff attitude about things.

How did it feel to work on both script and art during Hellboy's early days, thereby having almost total control over your creation?

It's interesting, because initially I never wanted to write this stuff. I enjoyed coming up with stories, but liked the safety net of having a writer who'd put the words in there. John Byrne co-wrote the first *Hellboy* ➤



Mignola is among the most respected comic authors working today.



The *Hellboy* cartoon has widened the appeal.



There's an impressive consistency in tone across the media.



The movie was a very good companion piece to the comic.



story, and my original plan was to give him a 'laundry list' of things I wanted to draw and have him knock it into shape. But by that point, I was making things up fast and, little-by-little, piecing the story together. I soon found there were things John changed that sounded more polished and professional, but they lacked the oddness and quirkiness of what I wrote, and some of the humour didn't translate. John knew this, but all along he'd been saying I should be writing everything anyway; he never tried to make *Hellboy* his book, and he treated himself like bicycle training wheels! I can't thank him enough for that, and at the end of the series, he told me I was on my own!

The scariest moment was when I took over the next one, writing and drawing everything – it was in black and white, so I didn't even have a colourist. But once I relaxed, I found there were so many things I could do as writer and artist.

The *Hellboy* comic is quite cinematic. Was the potential for a movie always at the back of your mind?

It never occurred to me, because I never thought I'd get to do a second *Hellboy* story! I thought I'll do this one, and when no one buys it, I'll limp back to whatever job I can get from Marvel or DC, but I'd at least be able to look back and say I once got to put my personality on the page. When Dark Horse said it was interested in developing a *Hellboy* film, I went: "Sure, I'm happy to take the movie option money, as long as you guys want to keep optioning it, but no one will ever

Mignola's style has rightly won acclaim from all quarters. Frankly, it's stunning.

ESSENTIAL HELLBOY

With many different goodies to choose from, we direct you to the key instalments in the *Hellboy* universe...



Hellboy: Seed Of Destruction

Where it all began, in more ways than one, this trade compiles Hellboy's 'origins' story, and the very first Hellboy stories produced.



Hellboy: The Right Hand Of Doom

The fourth *Hellboy* collection includes a number of shorter stories, including classic folklore adaptation 'Heads'.



B.P.R.D.: Hollow Earth And Other Stories

Spin-off series *B.P.R.D.* concentrates on the other members in Hellboy's team, and is just as compelling as *Hellboy*.



Hellboy Animated: Blood And Iron

The best of the two animated features, *Blood And Iron* has set pieces that would make movie directors drool uncontrollably.



Hellboy: Director's Cut

The director's cut of the movie fleshes out the big-screen intro to Hellboy's world, along with providing hours of engrossing extras.



Mignola didn't have complete control over the film.

make a film of this." When I met Del Toro, I realised if anybody was going to make a *Hellboy* film, he was the guy to do it, but it was always such an uphill battle that I never thought it was gonna happen.

Was it hard seeing *Hellboy* changed for the big screen?

I'm not someone who says something needs to be like the source material. In fact, during my first meeting with Del Toro, I told him: "I'd love for the film to be true to the spirit of the character, but you turn it into whatever you want to." I actually had an idea for an easier *Hellboy* movie; Del Toro was the one who wanted the film to be faithful to the comic!

But there are fairly big changes from the comic...

Yeah. Del Toro thought the love interest was necessary, and there were scenes in there he'd wanted to do for years, which *Hellboy* became a vehicle for. But that's great! I wanted a filmmaker with his own agenda, because then you get an interesting film. And the process was good; we mostly saw eye-to-eye. But the five per cent where we didn't was hard, because it was his film, and he had the final say on certain things with my character. To survive that, I had to remember the comic's the comic, the film's the film, and that I was working with a guy I really liked on *his* movie, not working on my movie. It's a similar experience with the sequel, but increasingly the film is Del Toro's, especially as the story veers further from the comic.

Why is the sequel's direction towards the folklore side of the comics?

That was a conscious decision we both made, because that element was missing from the first film, which instead had the Lovecraft-meets-pulp-magazine-mad-scientist stuff. If you look at the two films together, you see the range of *Hellboy*.

How hard a pitch was *Hellboy 2*?

It was easier when *Pan's Labyrinth* came out, which I'd not seen when we made up the story. Because we were pitching a story where Hellboy fights fairies and elves, we knew we'd have to jump in at some point and say: "But it's not what you think! It's going to be dark and scary!" After *Pan's Labyrinth*, this was easier for studios to understand. People usually think of cute fairies in a garden, but in *Hellboy* you'll see a nasty kind of fairy, and that's not what an audience is used to.

What prompted the *Hellboy* animated features?

Del Toro talked about an animation, and Revolution Studios set it up. I wasn't the driving force behind it, but when I heard they wanted to do animation, I recommended *Hellboy* fan Ted Stone, who'd been at Disney and had recently become available. For an animation to happen, someone needed to be involved who understood the comic, because clearly Del Toro wasn't going to have time to devote to it, and I'm not an animator. We needed someone who knew animation and who knew *Hellboy*.

Are you happy with the visual style, since it's very different to your own?

I think the fans feel otherwise, but I was very happy the studio didn't want to use my style. When things are in my style, I sit there going: "Oh, they don't understand it, they're not doing it right." I just see the mistakes. And the style is another thing that distances it from the comics, making the animation an alternate version of *Hellboy*. It remains faithful, though, and the animation is closer to the stories I did than the movies.

Is it difficult to no longer be totally in control of *Hellboy*?

On one hand, it's great, because I'm exposing *Hellboy* to a much wider

audience, and more people will discover the comic. The flip side is that most will never see what I do, but at least I got something out to the world! And as someone who erases ten lines for every one he draws, not drawing for a while was actually a kind of relief. But you start to miss getting your hands into everything, and there's a danger of spending so much time overseeing different things that you can't focus on any one thing.

What is the future for Mike Mignola?

I've been writing these past couple of years, and I'm getting that itch to draw and write some material myself, because there's so much interesting stuff you can do when you're doing everything yourself. I want to do something that's more experimental, where I'm playing with the art form. I've also just co-wrote and illustrated *Baltimore: Or, The Steadfast Tin Soldier And The Vampire* with Chris Golden, and that worked out well. A few other things I've made up (which could be 200-page graphic novels) I'm not in a position to do, but the idea of writing them up, handing them over to Chris, and collaborating on another novel that I'd illustrate – that's something we've talked about doing.

And *Hellboy*?

Hellboy has a future. I've plotted it to the end of the series – or what could be the end – so my goal is to get to do the whole story. Hopefully, I can get Duncan Fegredo [*Hellboy*'s new main artist] to stick around to the bitter end! I'm really happy with the collaboration, and I just want to finish the story!

That'd be great to see; few long-running series have a coherent beginning, middle and end. That's one of the problems of mainstream comics: they have the illusion of change, but they're properties of giant companies. They'll never let you keep Superman dead! But because I control *Hellboy* – at least the comic-book version – I can make definite changes with the character, and they're happening right now. It's very strange: after ten years fumbling around in the *Hellboy* world, it's now set on a certain course, and I'm turning corners where there's no going back, which is exciting, but daunting.

The weird thing will be if Del Toro gets to do a third *Hellboy* film, which would probably be the end of that film cycle. He'd be doing the end of *Hellboy* a decade before I get to. One thing I've got to be real careful of is that I don't tell Del Toro how I plan to end the comic, because I sure as hell don't want him to put it on film first! ☞

INFORMATION BITES

Mike Mignola

// Born in the Sixties, in sunny California, Mike Mignola began his comics career due to wanting to "draw monsters for a living".

// Mike's early work largely included inking, and he worked on Marvel Comics' *Daredevil*, *Rocket Raccoon* and *Alpha Flight*.

// Mike's first breakthrough in the industry was arguably his work on *Batman*, which included covers, pencilling work and scripting.

// *Gotham By Gaslight*, to which Mike contributed, sees an 1880s Batman battling Jack The Ripper, and is now considered the first *Elseworlds* story.

// *Hellboy* first appeared in 1994, published by Dark Horse, drawing on Mike's many and varied interests.

// One-shot *ZombieWorld* was initially made up by Mike "as a joke on the phone" when talking to his editor.

// Many *Hellboy* trade paperbacks include additional or edited pages, discussions of content by the author, and other such extras.

// Although previously illustrating the bulk of *Hellboy*, Mike passed primary art duties to Duncan Fegredo in 2007.

// When *Hellboy* movie rights were optioned, Mike created a new character, in case the film was horrendous.

Along with working on the *Hellboy* movie, Mike also worked on *Blade II* and *Bram Stoker's Dracula*.



ESSEX COUNTY

Details Originally published *Essex County: Tales From The Farm/Ghost Stories/The Country Nurse* (2008/9) **Publisher** Top Shelf Productions **Writer** Jeff Lemire
Artist Jeff Lemire **Collected in** *Essex County* **Available digitally** Comixology

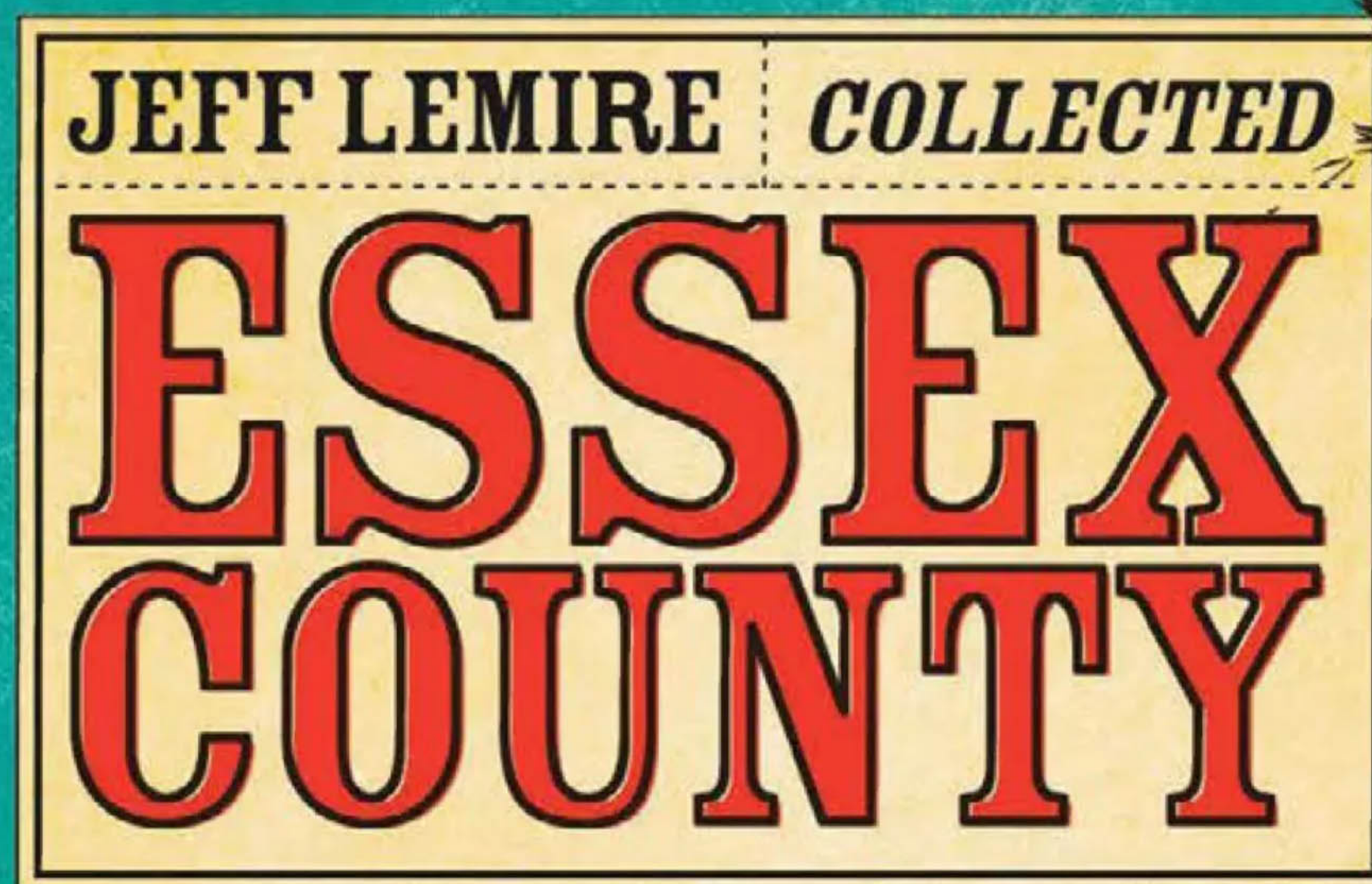
There's something deeply personal about even the most outlandish of Jeff Lemire's works.

From the fairy tale surrealism of *Sweet Tooth* to the superhero body horror of *Animal Man*, the Canadian writer/artist writes what he knows, gently leading the wildest products of his fevered imagination into the warm familiarity of his universe rather than the other way around.

The three graphic novel shorts collected in *Essex County* are steeped in the rural Canadiana (that's a thing, promise) of Lemire's Ontario hometown like the Great White North's answer to *Fargo*. There's the tale of an orphan boy on a farm who retreats into a private world of superheroics, two professional hockey players with a dark secret, and a travelling nurse who blends these oddballs tales together.

Brought to life with Lemire's minimal scratch, deft flicks of the pen suddenly rendering rough figures expressive and soulful, there's nothing else in comics quite like the sparse beauty of *Essex County*.

"RENDERING ROUGH FIGURES EXPRESSIVE AND SOULFUL"





NEW X-MEN

Details Originally published New X-Men #114-116 (2001) **Publisher** Marvel
Writer Grant Morrison **Artists** Various **Collected in** New X-Men: E Is For Evolution
Available digitally Comixology, Marvel Unlimited

Part of a Marvel-wide initiative to modernise and revitalise comics for the new millennium, *New X-Men* saw a lot of the high-camp escapes of decades past traded in in favour of a more realistic and believable flavour. Grant Morrison brought a better type of character development to the X-Men, treating them each as individuals, rather than a singular ensemble cast.

Taking all the best parts of X-Men lore – the Hellfire Club, the Shi'Ar, Sentinels and more – and adapting them into a more grounded format, Morrison set the foundations for storylines that would eventually make their way into the *X-Men* film canon. The whole run sees a variety of artists come and go, but never is the partnership between writer and artist unsatisfactory: there's always a focus, always a viable and meaningful story to be told, and even when Morrison introduces questionable new villain Cassandra Nova, you're investment with the kids at the Xavier School never lessens.

**"TREATS THE X-MEN
AS INDIVIDUALS RATHER
THAN AN ENSEMBLE"**



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Leialoha ♦ Hamilton

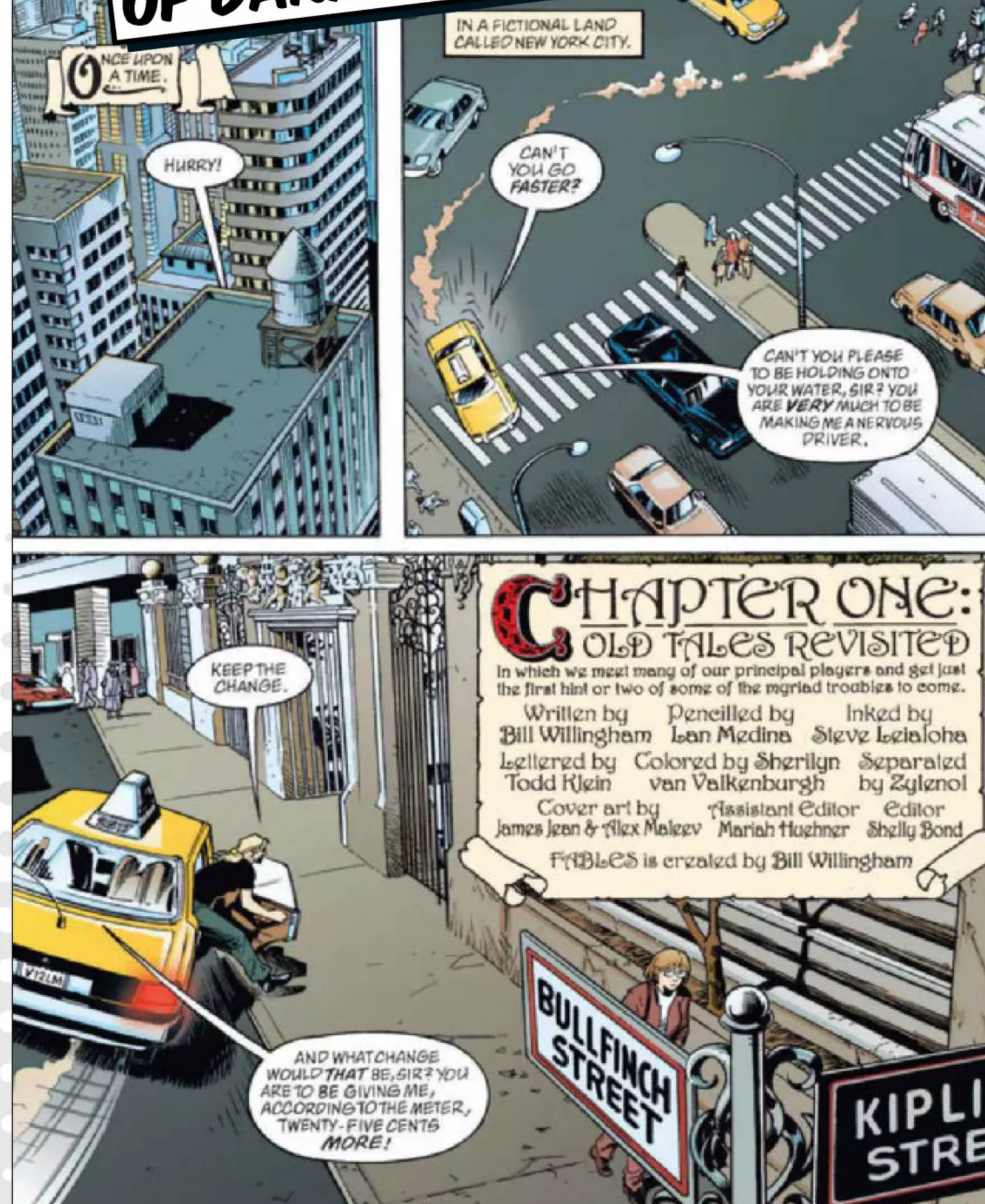
FABLES: LEGENDS IN EXILE

Details Originally published Fables #1-5 (2002) **Publisher** Vertigo **Writer** Bill Willingham **Artist** Mark Buckingham
Collected in Fables: Vol 1 - Legends In Exile **Available digitally** Comixology

Vertigo established itself as a force to be reckoned with in the publishing world after a creative assault spanning two decades. Nobody suspected that success could be sustained in the dawn of a new millennium. Then again, we never expected Bill Willingham to present an idea that was so damn readable.

Manhattan's Upper West Side has a secret: a hidden community of exiled fairy tale characters. Snow White, Bluebeard, Cinderella and a host of other famous faces from folklore take centre stage as they struggle to survive in the shadow of New York City. *Fables* is one of the finest examples of dark fantasy out there. It cleverly subverts the classic interpretation of fantastical adventure these characters are commonly associated with in favour of exploring murder mysteries, political intrigue and a host of taboos. It pushed beyond the restraints of traditional fairy tales and established a thrilling new mythology that has stood the test of time.

"ONE OF THE FINEST EXAMPLES OF DARK FANTASY OUT THERE"



FINDER: VOICE

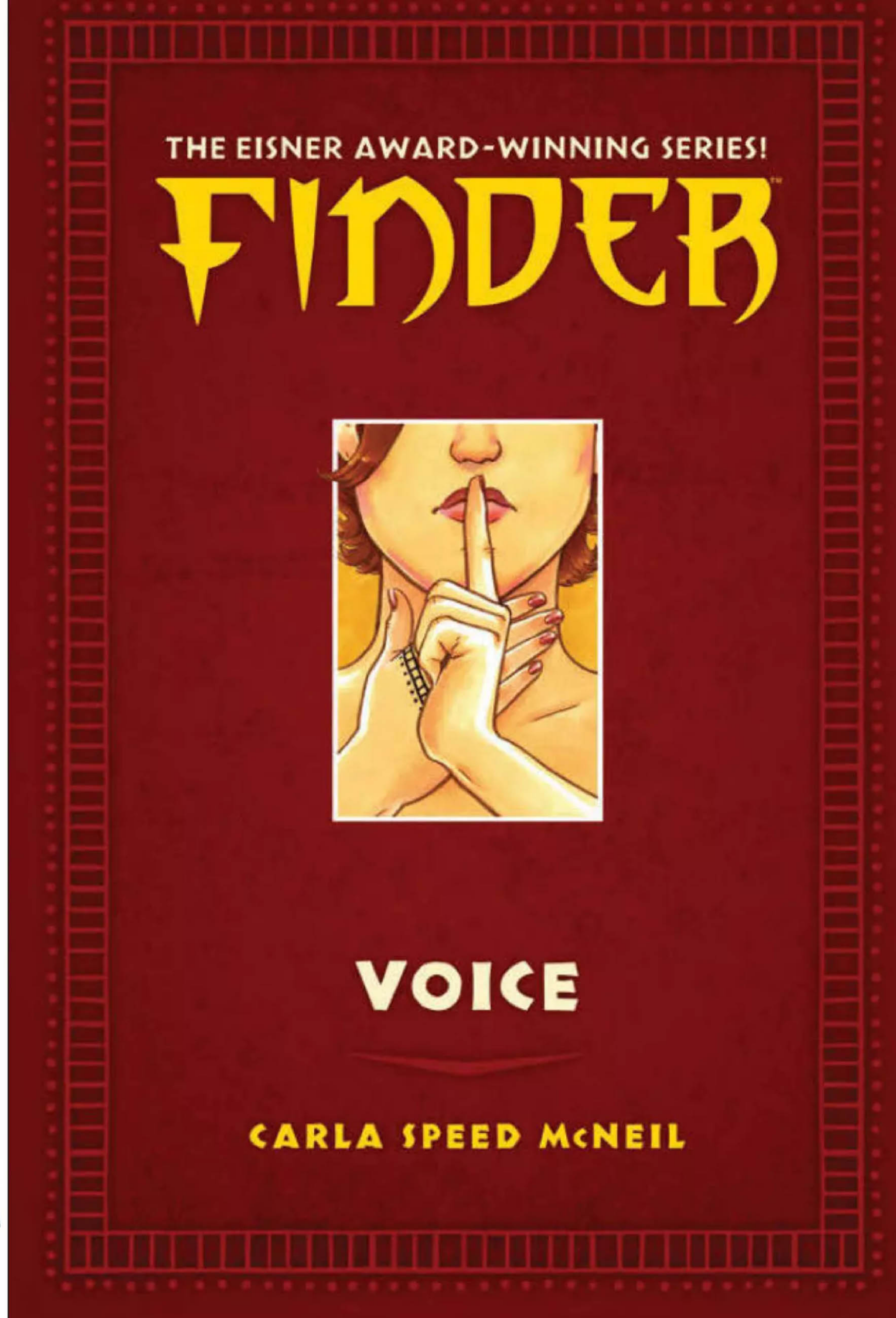
Details Originally published Online (2008) **Publishers** Lightspeed Press, Dark Horse **Writer** Carla Speed McNeil **Artist** Carla Speed McNeil
Collected in Finder: Voice **Available digitally** Dark Horse Digital, Kindle

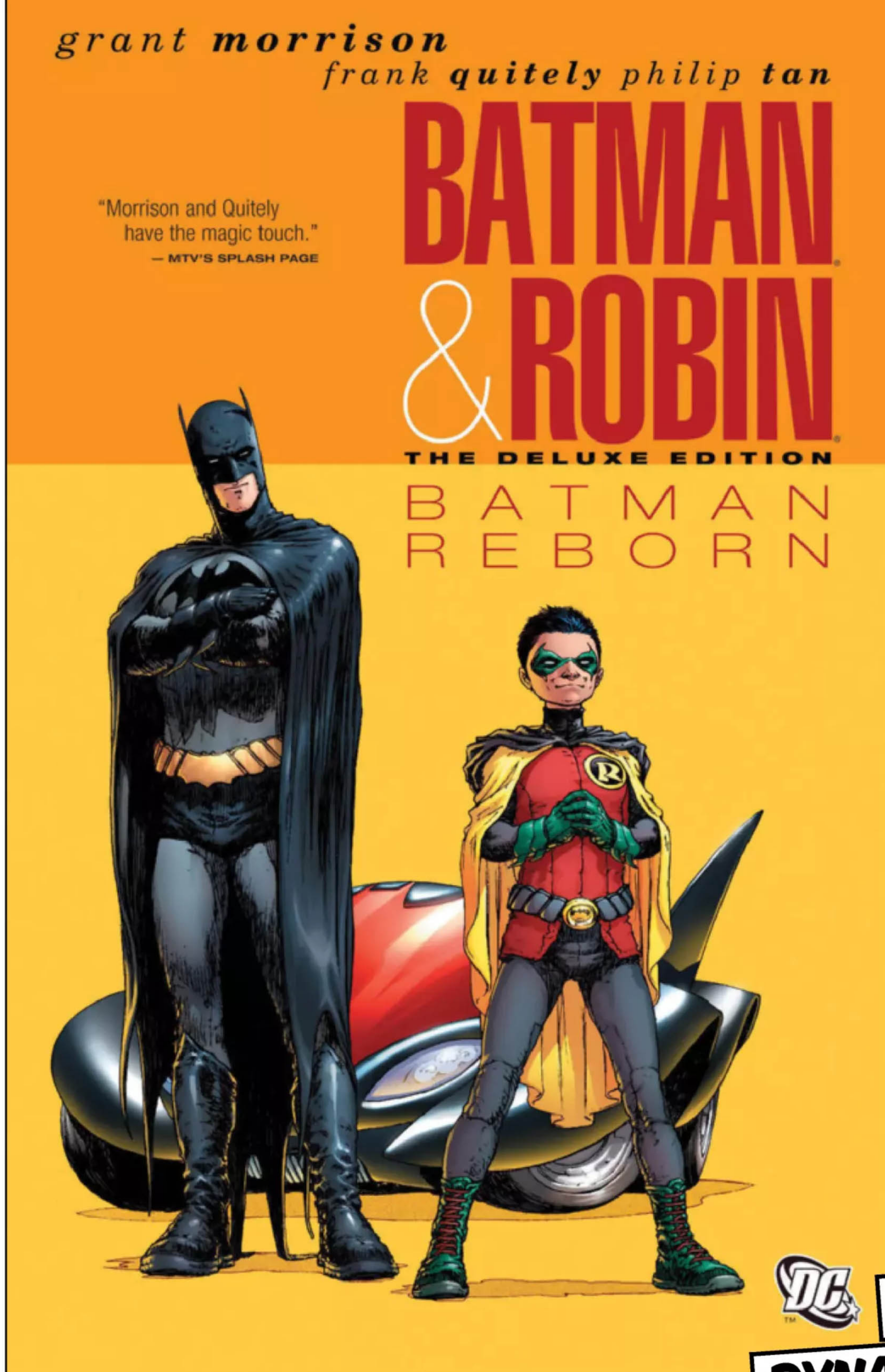
First published in the late Nineties, Carla Speed McNeil's *Finder* is still ongoing today. *Voice* is designed as the perfect jumping-on point for any new reader to this science fiction epic. For the many who become swift addicts, the overall story is well worth becoming lost in.

Finder is set in the far future, built on the ruins of our own world, with much of the existing technology being mysterious to this new society. Genetic purity is the be all and end all, with strict self-policing being the status quo. Those who fail to make the grade live outside the domes that the full citizens inhabit. Jaeger, a half-breed, is a 'Finder'. The Grosvenor family live in the domed city-state of Anvard, and all their children are daughters... even the boys.

An almost perplexing mix of the straightforward and the indescribable, *Finder* has a large and dedicated fandom that speaks volumes to the genius of the story. We highly recommend that you get stuck in, you most certainly will not regret it.

"WELL WORTH BECOMING LOST IN"





BATMAN & ROBIN: BATMAN REBORN

Details Originally published Batman & Robin #1-6 (2009-10) **Publisher** DC
Writer Grant Morrison **Artists** Frank Quitely, Philip Tan **Collected in** Batman & Robin:
 Vol 1 – Batman Reborn **Available digitally** Comixology

When Dick Grayson and Damian Wayne become Batman and Robin in *Batman Reborn*, the grim Batman/carefree Robin dynamic is turned on its head. Now it's Robin who's pathologically driven, and Batman who jokes with Alfred and sets cops at ease.

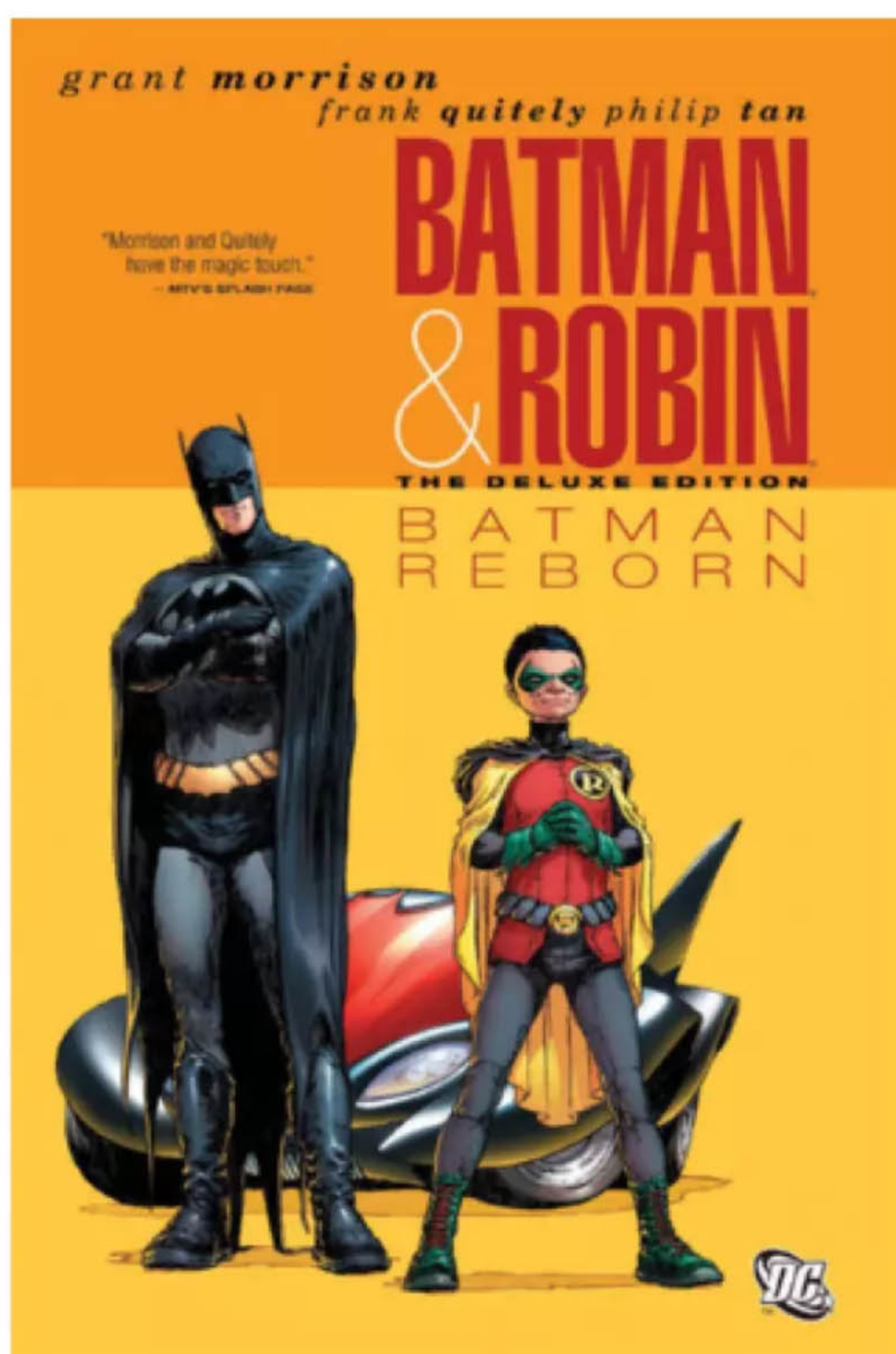
Like most Morrison-authored comics, *Batman Reborn* is highly strange. New villain Professor Pyg surgically alters people's faces, bodies and minds to turn them into 'Dollotrons' while chanting about chaos goddesses. However, Dick and Damian's banter lightens even the darkest moments.

Dick's sociability and circus performer past enable him to make his own mark as Batman, and to tackle problems that Bruce might have at least taken a while to solve. At the same time, Damian begins forging a brotherly bond with Dick that develops into friendship and affection over the course of the series.

It's disturbing, funny, touching and very weird: Morrison at the top of his superhero game.

**"THE BATMAN/ROBIN
DYNAMIC IS TURNED ON ITS HEAD"**





GRANT MORRISON

HE'S NOT QUITTING SUPERHEROES – SAYING BYE TO BATMAN AND SO LONG TO SUPERMAN – BUT HE IS TAKING A BREATHER. WHILE PROJECTS BREW IN THE MIND OF GRANT MORRISON, WE TALK TO THE LEGENDARY WRITER ABOUT WINDING DOWN BATMAN INC AND ACTION COMICS, HIS SERIES HAPPY! AND WHAT COMES NEXT...

When Grant Morrison announced that he was finishing his run on both Action Comics and Batman Incorporated in 2012 and taking a break from the grind of monthly comics, the fan communities went into overdrive.

The headlines hit the ground in a storm of over-excited punctuation – Grant Morrison Quits DC! Grant Morrison Finished With Superheroes! Grant Morrison Leaving Comics! – none of which were true.

Morrison is used to his quotes being taken out of context – and in some cases taken out of any hint of reality – but looking beyond the headlines revealed the true story: the writer was moving out of ongoing superhero titles and concentrating on a number of new projects, including superheroes, both within DC and with other publishers, including Image. We caught up with Morrison in a bar in Edinburgh to chat about leaving Clark and Bruce behind and what is yet to come, while noting that the location, The Voodoo Rooms bar, was perhaps a rather apt venue in which to meet the enigmatic writer.

With DC's New 52, the continuity of the DC timeline has been completely updated, squashing decades into a five-year span to create a more contemporary feel. This has, however, resulted in some characters disappearing, which proved controversial with fans, as well as some confusion over which stories in the past are still considered canon. As someone who had previously woven together the entire Batman mythos into one continuous whole, how did Morrison cope with writing *Batman Incorporated* in the new DC Universe?

"I just thought that ultimately it will all eventually stretch out again," Morrison explains. "I thought it was more inclusive to have all of Batman's history in the story and to even accommodate the fact that his history's

kind of changed slightly again, because it will change again. So I just wanted to keep with what I had, and there were some things we had to change – like suddenly Stephanie Brown didn't exist, and Cassandra Cain doesn't exist, and they'll get reintroduced in some way potentially – but I had this really great scene in *Batman Incorporated* #4 with these two characters in it, and I liked them. I thought there were things we could do with it – I liked the fact it was two women there."

The loss of Stephanie Brown, replaced as Batgirl by her original predecessor, Barbara Gordon, has attracted a particularly dramatic reaction from fans. *Batman Incorporated* #3 featured a page where a blonde woman is kidnapped and brainwashed, and subsequently reappears as a redhead with dangerous intent – a play, perhaps, on the change from blonde to red-headed Batgirl?

"No, it wasn't any commentary; sometimes these things just happen spontaneously," Morrison laughs. "So yes, it was commentary if you saw commentary! But no, she's just gone. I liked that character. Not that there's much there, honestly, but there's something."

One character that has remained prominent in Batman's life is his son, Damian, a character that was reintroduced by Morrison six years ago and had largely remained in his care until the New 52 launch. Still a favourite with the fans, Damian currently appears in a number of Bat-titles, including *Batman Incorporated*. Is Morrison kept abreast of what the character is doing in his other adventures?

"I read [the comics] when they come out, but I don't usually get sent anything," he frowns. "I send in these detailed plot synopses at the start of everything... I never see anybody's plot synopses!"

The thought occurs that perhaps others are shown Morrison's outlines rather than the other way around.

"George Perez didn't seem to get mine!" Morrison laughs. "But yeah, I've no idea what's happening, I just... I don't bother about that stuff. I remember at the start of this they said they wanted to tie in with [*Batman* writer] Scott Snyder and [*Detective Comics* writer] Pete Tomasi, and you've got to tell them if you want to do this – I said, 'No, those guys have got their own big stories to tell, I'm sure we'll make it work.' That's why people hate me! But it's not important; I'd rather see what they've got to say, even if I don't necessarily agree with it."

It's clear that Morrison has something particular in mind. "Damian should not have a dog; Damian had a cat," he states flatly. "I'm really upset that they gave him a dog, because we've already seen him growing up in the future with a cat, and I had this plan to introduce this kitten, but he's brought a dog into it..."

The writer tails off glumly, before we remember the arrival of Bat-Cow earlier in the series. "Oh, he's got a cow!" Morrison grins. "So maybe... I think he should have a whole menagerie of bat-animals."

Morrison is finishing *Batman Incorporated* with Issue 12, and has extended his *Action Comics* run to Issue 17, long after his initially planned first six-issue run. While the *Superman* title chronicles the adventures of Superman in the present day, *Action Comics* is set five years in the past, and focuses on a young Clark Kent who has not yet got to grip with his powers. This is the Superman who can leap over buildings, rather than the indestructible god he becomes.

"I was only going to do the first six," he says, "and then [artist] Rags Morales needed a couple of issues off, so I had this insert ➤



“A LOT OF ANGER HAS
COME OUT IN THESE
FINAL SUPERMAN
AND BATMANS
GRANT MORRISON”

Morrison's Weirdest Moments

Our favourite off-kilter moments from Morrison's DC output



1 Batman: The Return Of Bruce Wayne

Bruce awakes in the time of Neanderthals, having fallen through the timestream. It's like *Doctor Who*, but with Batman!



2 Doom Patrol Issue 36 'Box Of Delights'

The team investigate a disturbance, and wander into a sentient street called Danny – who also happens to be a transvestite.



3 Animal Man Issue 5 'The Coyote Gospel'

A real-life cartoon escapes his hellish dimension to bargain for the good of his people.



4 Seven Soldiers: Zatanna

The spellaholic and her fellow magic users enter the astral plane, climbing across cubes and panels and above the paths of their past selves.



5 Batman RIP

Bruce Wayne has a psychotic breakdown, makes himself a neon, multi-coloured Batsuit and takes advice from the imaginary Bat-Mite.

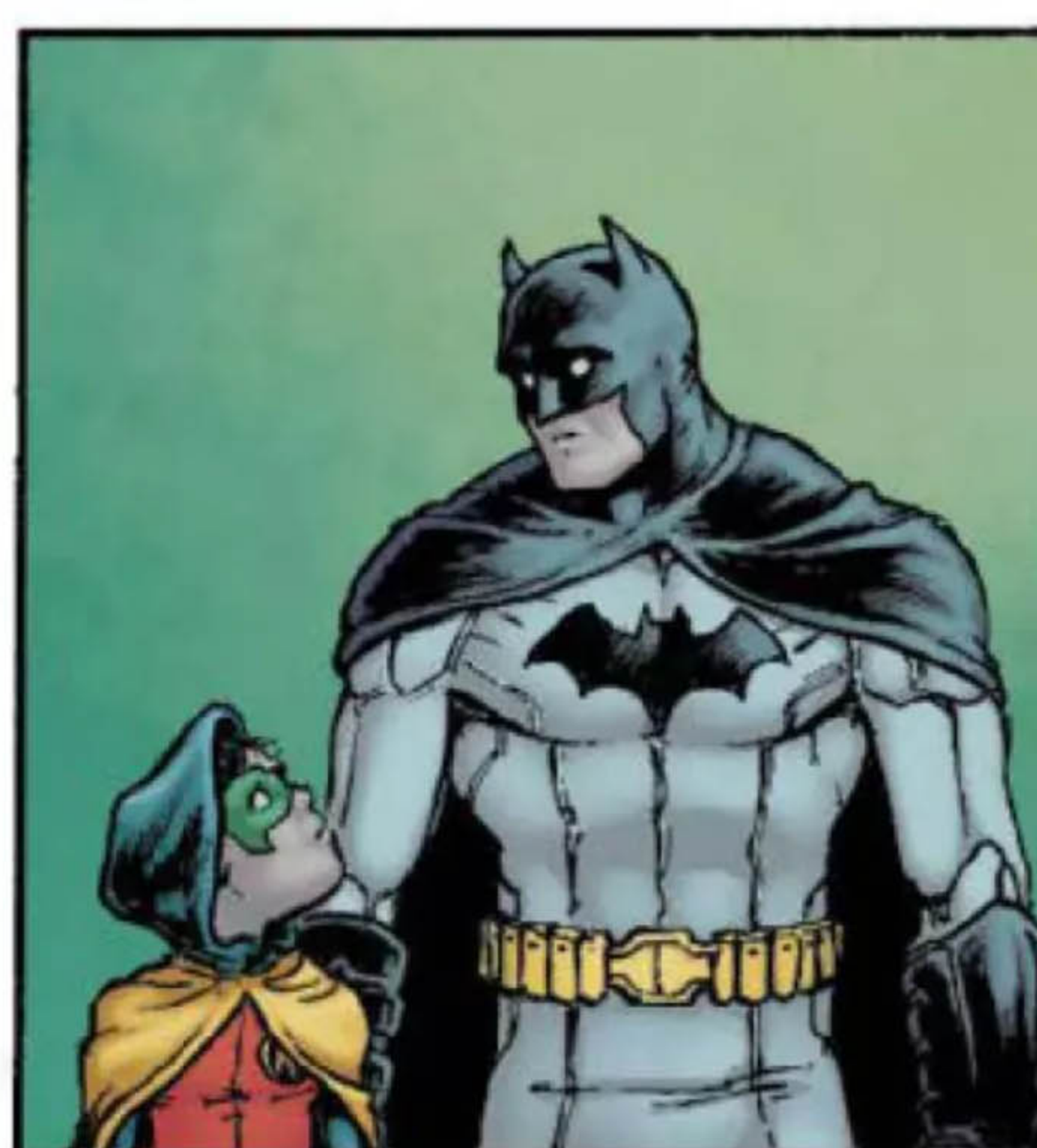


Morrison's *Superman* depicts a younger man of steel, far removed from the unstoppable force he is variously portrayed as.



Even while tackling other projects, superhero comics remain in Morrison's crosshairs.





Morrison's run on *Batman Incorporated* has enabled him to keep on writing Damian Wayne, a character he played a large role in developing.

➤ which freaked everybody out, then we came back. After that I had set up things, because I wrote these two issues to fill in, and had to fill them with this future plot, so suddenly I had that to deal with, and I felt I'd better just stay on and finish the story. It ended up turning into something quite interesting."

That was definitely the final stretch, however, with Morrison's last issue out in February 2013. "I felt as if I'd stayed on too long, so once I got this thing it gets quite sinister towards the end," he teases.

The writer is keen to stress that despite some of the headlines, he remains on good terms with the publisher. Indeed, he has more work with them in the following years. Much of his upcoming work with Vertigo and Image remains shrouded in mystery, however.

"Yeah it is a bit," Morrison smiles, "apart from *Seaguy 3*, the final *Seaguy* which I've told everyone I'm doing. But there's other stuff which I haven't talked about yet that's kinda getting done just now."

Is his focus, then, on more finite series rather than ongoing titles? "There's one idea I have, which is a long thing," he says, "because I haven't done anything like that for a while, but most of them are finite. I wanted to tell stories, you know? And again, getting away from some of the stuff that when you're working in the superhero universes it, as I've



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GRANT MORRISON

said before, it's not a real place. It's a real place in the sense that it's paper, but you're not writing about the real world; you're writing about this other world and the rules in that world and the relationships that form in that world, so there's a synthetic thing about it, which as much as I love it, it's not about here. And although Batman's about fighting against nihilism and the overwhelming sense of chaos in the universe, it's still stuck in the DC universe, and there might be more direct ways to say that. I just decided I want to tell some stories; you know, a beginning, middle and end, a really cool story that someone's sat you down in front of the fire and told you."

His current miniseries, *Happy!*, with art by Darick Robertson and published by Image Comics, is exactly that. Already attracting rave reviews, the tale of a loser in a hellhole of a town may not sound like something you'd want to read around the fire, but it comes with a spectacular twist: a tiny flying horse, full of optimism that only the protagonist can see.

"It's a really great design that Darick's done; it's just like a special effect. But yeah, when I was sitting thinking a couple of years ago, I had this idea that you know everyone takes the piss out of celebrities, and takes the piss out of

singers and actors and everyone who's trying to create things, no matter how bad they are. I had this notion that a lot of these people are losing their minds doing this. You think, 'This is golden youth; you should be feeling a lot better.'

"So the whole thing became about that struggle, and then into it came this Christmas thing and this really nice little kidnap plot; it's everything horrible about the world. I've got paedophiles, drunks, methadone addicts, Santa Claus is a bastard, your lead character's a failure; he's got all kinds of problems. And into it comes this last fading thing; it doesn't really have long to live, that's what it's about."

With many of the writers and artists that have left DC and Marvel recently turning towards creator-owned projects, Image is quickly becoming one of the most successful publishers around.

"I look at them as almost like the HBO of comics," says Morrison, "where people are going with very specific ideas that maybe wouldn't be able to be published with any of the other companies. The creator-owned thing, for me, I've always owned my own stuff going back to the Seventies, so for me it's not a major issue. It's interesting to see that something's happening right now with a lot of people who've done superhero comics for a few years and started to move out and spread their wings a little bit. But there's always been, for me, a creator-owned book over here, plus a company-owned book over there running at the same time."

Morrison fans can rest assured, though, that he isn't turning his back on superheroes. His much-hyped *Multiversity* finally hit the shelves in August 2014, and the writer is clearly very attached to the characters he's been writing for the last few years. His Batman creation, Damien was also released into the animated movie world this year in *Son of Batman*.

"When you see Batman you have this lovely notion," Morrison laughs, "of 'well, I'll be like that one day, I'm gonna have a big dispenser on the wall, and it's got Caramac in it and Opal Fruits and salt and vinegar crisps, and that's what I'll have when I'm a millionaire.' And Batman's actually got that shit, you know? He's even branded them, so it'll be Batsalt and vinegar crisps. I think that's the appeal – the guy can do anything."

Most of the comics mentioned here are available from Comixology or on Kindle and are on sale in all good comic book stores.

ALIAS: THE SECRET ORIGINS OF JESSICA JONES

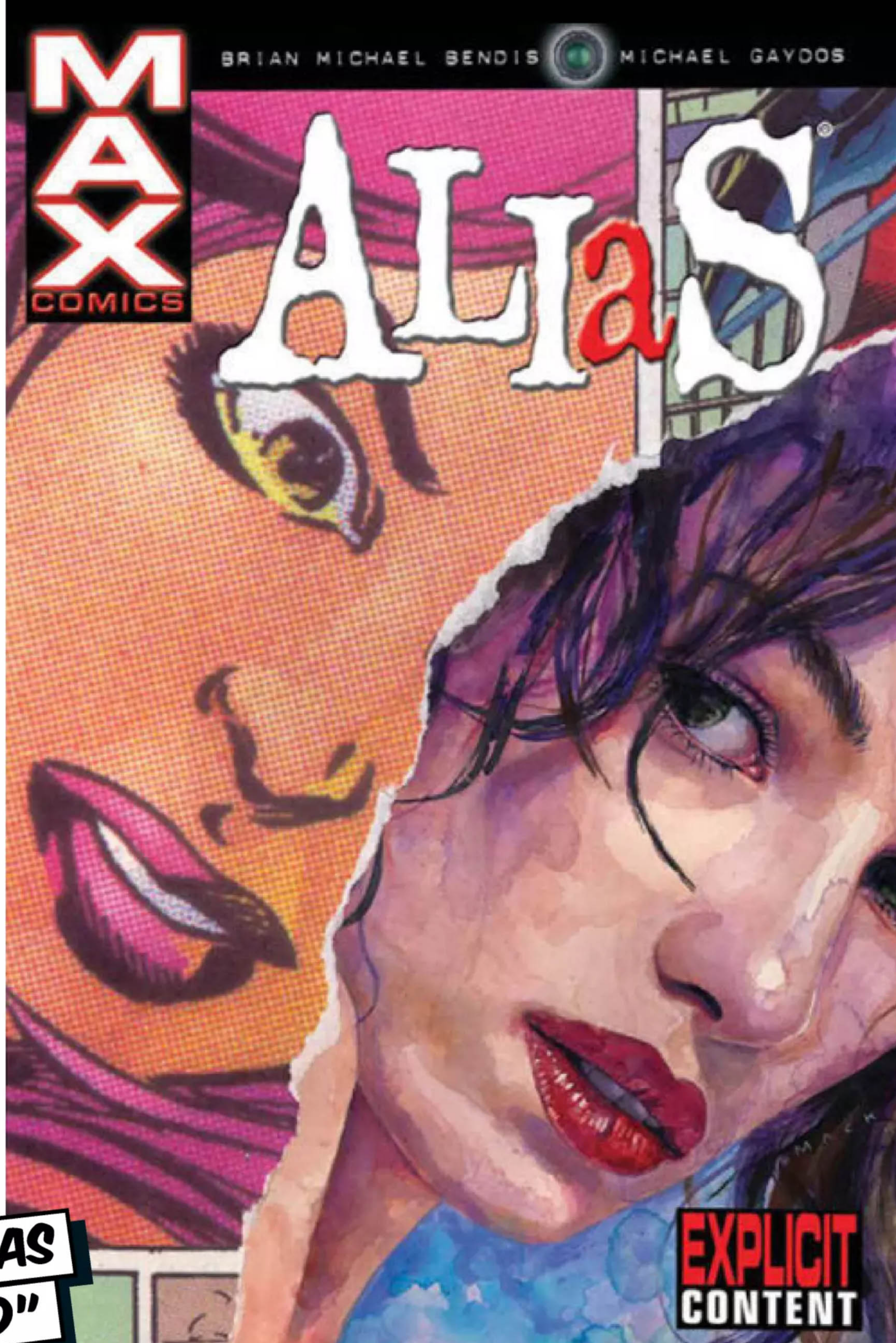
Details Originally published Alias #24-28 (2003-04) **Publisher** Marvel MAX **Writer** Brian Michael Bendis **Artist** Michael Gaydos **Collected in** Alias: Ultimate Collection, Book 2 **Available digitally** Comixology

Alias was part of Marvel's MAX imprint – same Marvel characters, but a lot swearier – and the series introduced readers to Jessica Jones, she of the upcoming Netflix show, scheduled for release following the well-received *Daredevil* series. She has super-strength (sort of) and can fly (not well), but an undisclosed traumatic event in her past forced her to give up superheroics and start running her own private detective company.

The whole series is great, but towards the end of *Alias*'s run, we finally got the story of her traumatic event at the hands of the mind-controlling, fourth-wall-breaking Purple Man. This arc, as well as bringing in a whole bunch of Marvel characters (Carol Danvers, Scott Lang, Jean Grey), is the perfect Jessica Jones story.

She swears a lot, is dysfunctional as hell, and is genuinely (and for very good reason) terrified for her life – but she still manages to triumph. She might be Marvel's most human hero.

"SHE SWEARS A LOT, IS DYSFUNCTIONAL AS HELL, AND IS TERRIFIED"



WOLVERINE®



CLAREMONT MILLER

WOLVERINE

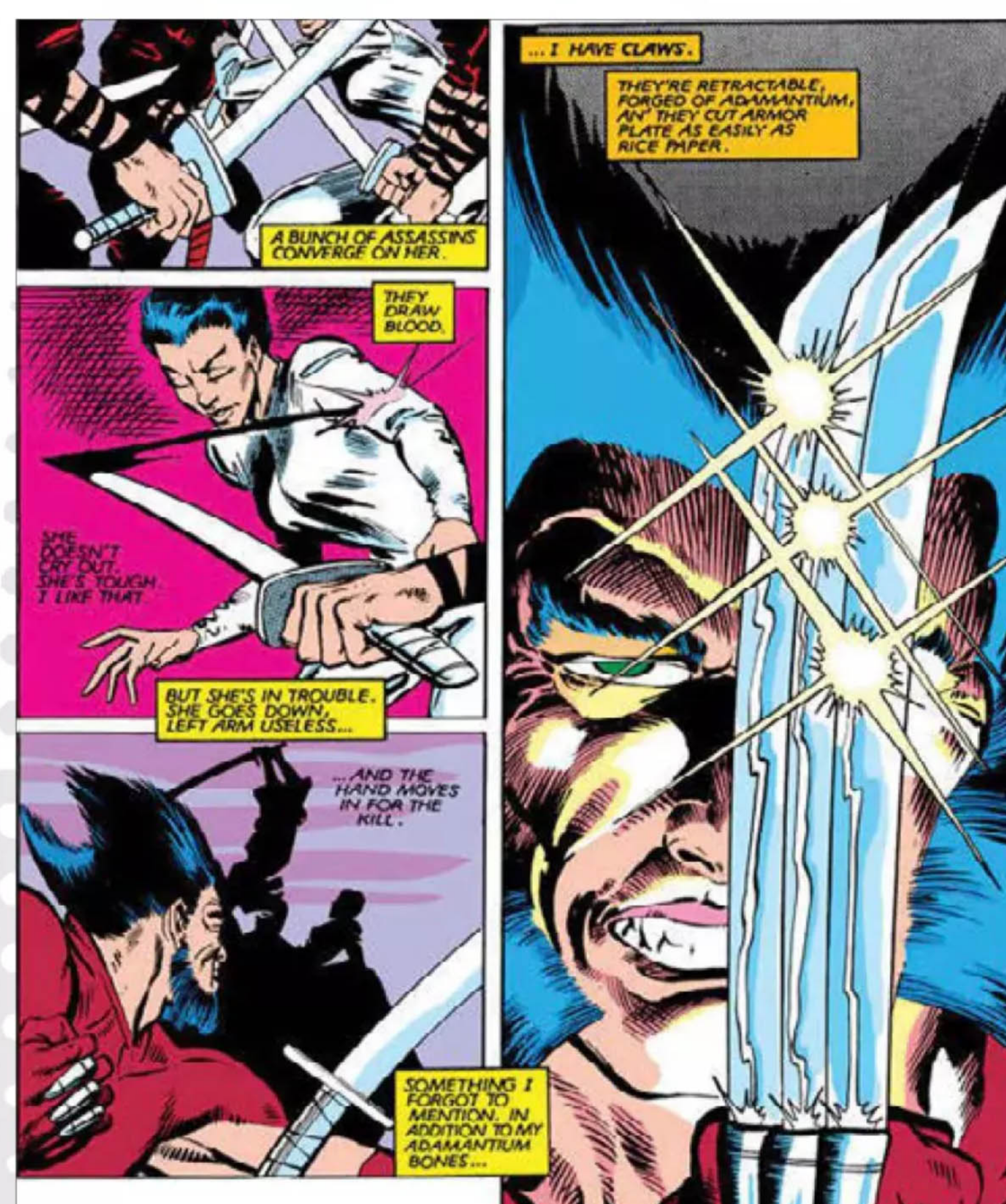
Details Originally published Wolverine #1-4, Uncanny X-Men #172-173 (1982) **Publisher** Marvel **Writer** Chris Claremont **Artists** Frank Miller, Paul Smith **Collected in** Wolverine **Available digitally** Comixology, Marvel Unlimited

Frank Miller may be inescapably linked to *Batman*, but it's clear that he prefers his superheroes without the 'super' and drenched in torrential rain. *X-Men* godfather Chris Claremont, meanwhile, gave us a world where Kitty Pryde has a pet dragon. Thought up whilst stuck in a traffic jam together, *Wolverine* was clearly influenced by their then surroundings.

An odd couple worthy of a Eighties buddy cop movie, the original Wolverine miniseries (which continued in the pages of *Uncanny X-Men* and should rightly be read as one volume) instead proved worthy of any list of the fan-favourite's greatest outings.

A major influence on 2014's *The Wolverine* – the better of the two stand-alone Wolverine movies – this was Logan finally off the leash, showing us the world of Yakuza, Ninja and a lone wolf trapped between his savage, animalistic id and his noble higher purpose.

Forget his convoluted origin story/stories (subject to whichever memory implant is currently in vogue), this is everything you need to know about the X-Men's true breakout star, forget about anything else on your shelf.



JIMMY CORRIGAN

Details Originally published Acme Novelty Library #5-14 (1995-2000)

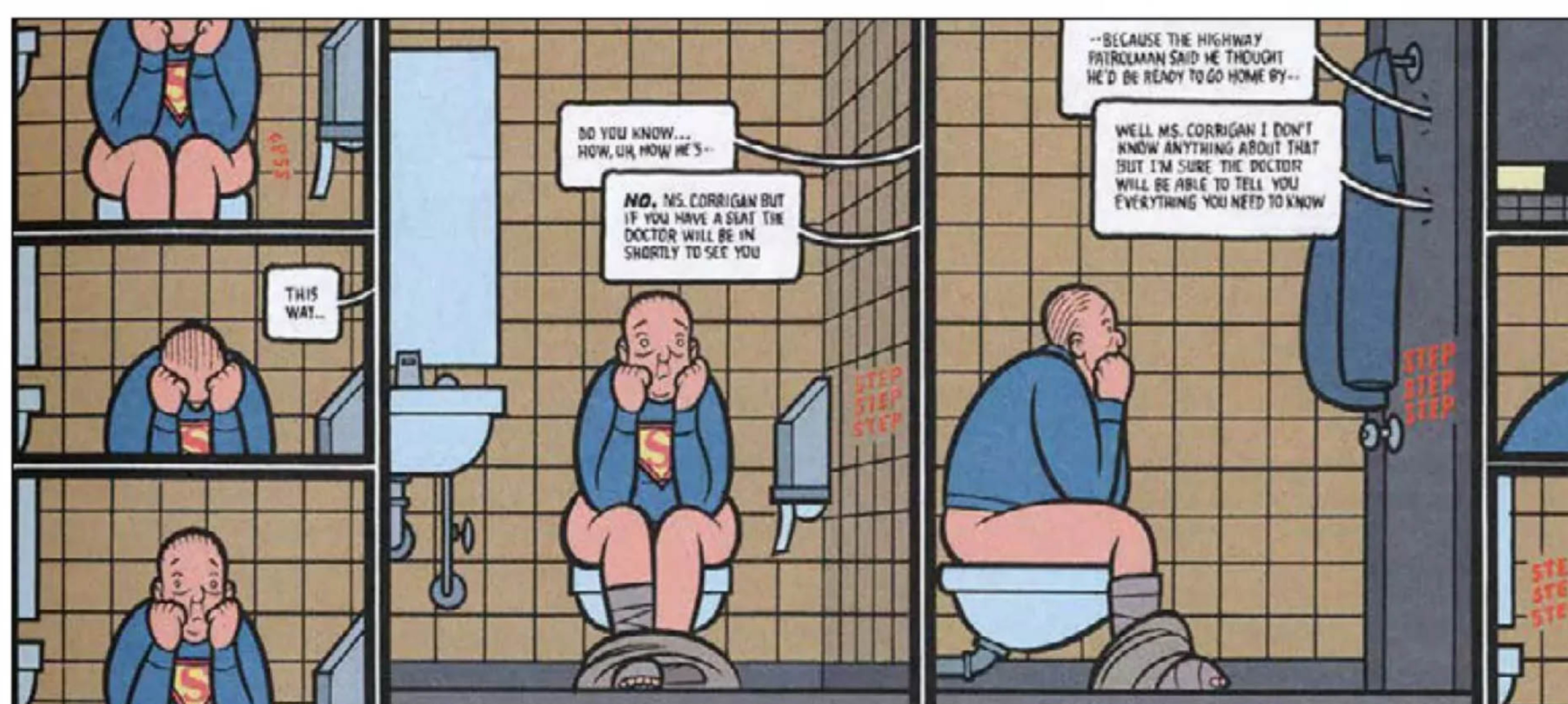
Publisher Jonathan Cape **Writer** Chris Ware **Artist** Chris Ware

Collected in Jimmy Corrigan, The Smartest Kid On Earth **Available digitally** N/A

Chris Ware is a design genius, creating comics that look nothing like anything else out there. Invoking early 20th Century Americana in his style, Ware embraces those familiar artistic themes of social isolation, emotional torment and depression. It's remarkable, then, that his work is a joy to read!

Jimmy is a lonely and socially awkward middle-aged man with an overactive imagination preparing to meet his father for the first time, and the book explores the previous generations of the Corrigan family in order to explain just why Jimmy is such a pathetic creature. And pathetic he is – unflinchingly so, with Ware focusing on explanations for his behaviour rather than excuses.

Hailed by *The New Yorker* for being the first masterpiece of the medium, *Jimmy Corrigan* is also notable for being the first graphic novel to win a major British literary prize – the *Guardian* First Book Award – in 2001.



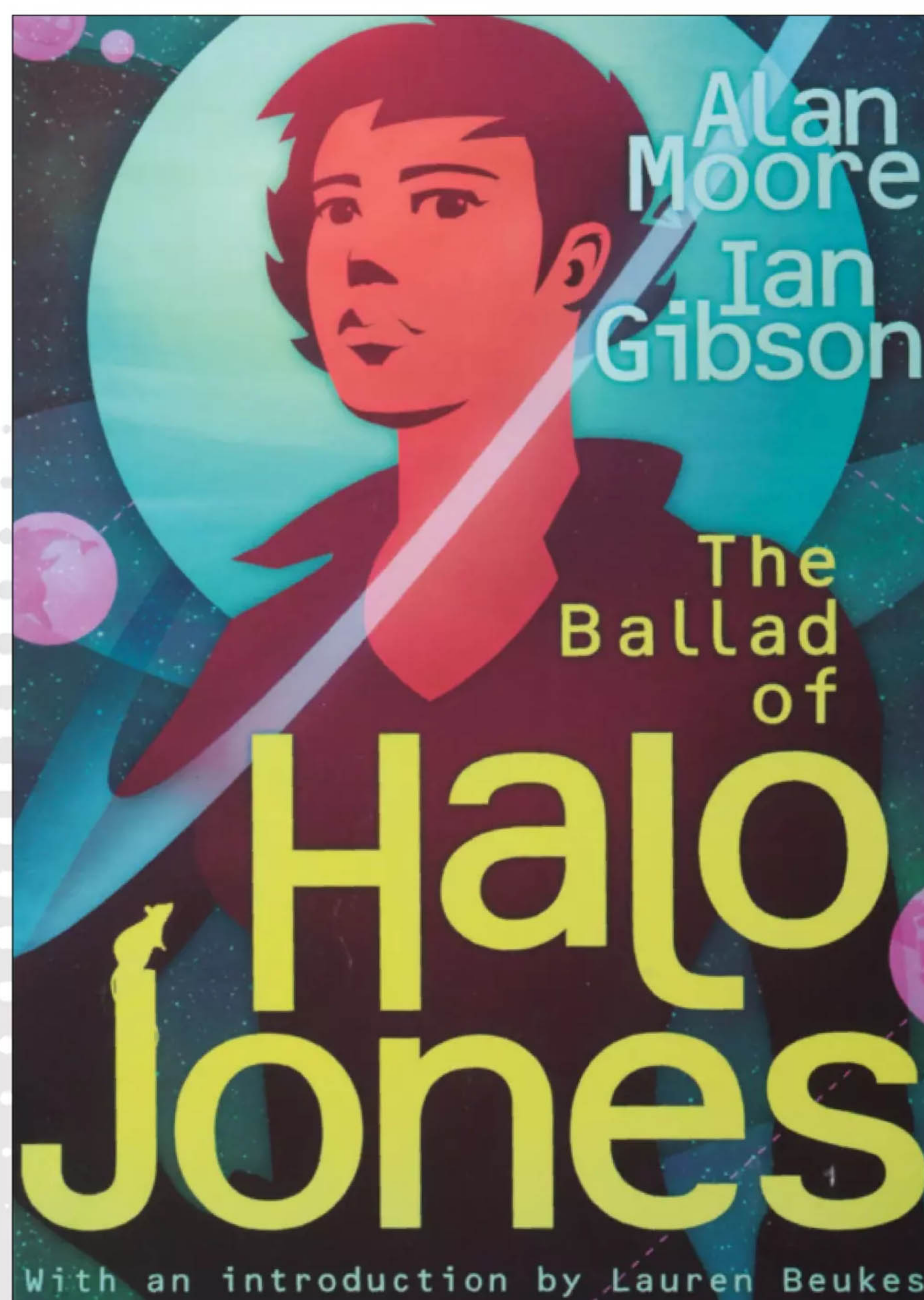
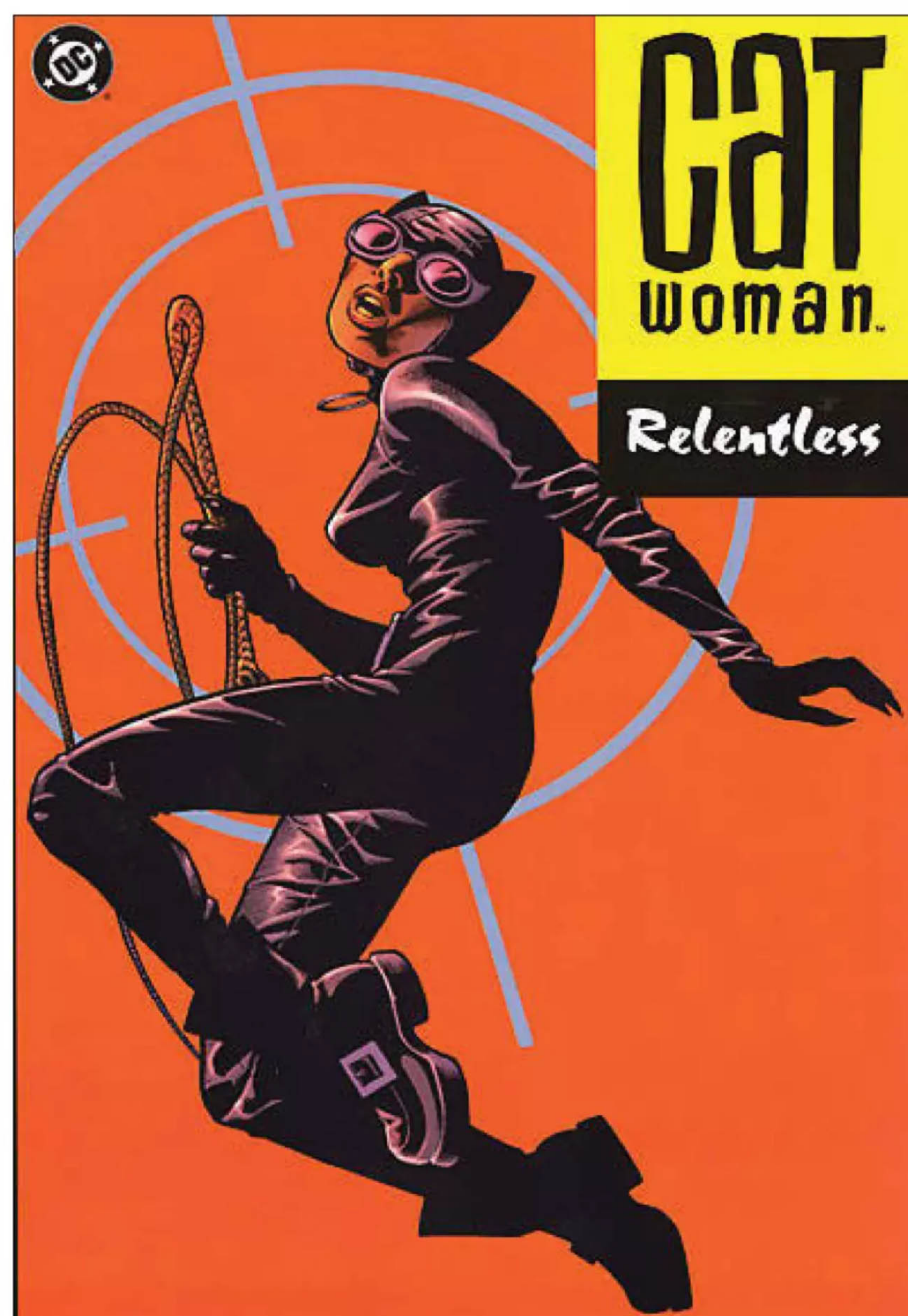
CATWOMAN: RELENTLESS

Details Originally published Catwoman #12-19 (2005) **Publisher** DC **Writer** Ed Brubaker **Artists** Cameron Stewart, Javier Pulido, JG Jones **Collected in** Catwoman: Relentless **Available digitally** Comixology

Long before the 'sexy sexy' *Catwoman* of the New 52, we had Ed Brubaker's excellent noir *Catwoman*, teaming Selina Kyle with gone-to-seed PI Slam Bradley and recovering heroin addict Holly Robinson. Initially with Darwyn Cooke on art duties, this Catwoman was socially

conscious, smart, capable and utterly ruthless if you hurt someone she cared about.

The 'Relentless' arc pitted Selina against Black Mask – a minor *Batman* villain given the freedom to grow into a terrifying menace in the pages of *Catwoman*. 'Relentless' is the best possible name for the arc; the hits just kept on coming for Selina, with her own sister getting pulled into her game of cat and mouse with Black Mask. This arc is a brutal, breathless and exhausting read, with wonderful art and tight plotting. You'll find yourself wondering why, when Catwoman can be this good, she's not heading up Hollywood films of her own.



THE BALLAD OF HALO JONES

Details Originally published 2000 AD Progs #376-466 (1984-86) **Publisher** Rebellion **Writer** Alan Moore **Artist** Ian Gibson **Collected in** The Complete Ballad Of Halo Jones **Available digitally** Comixology

In the early Eighties, Alan Moore was vocal in wanting to bring a woman-led story to sci-fi anthology 2000 AD. *The Ballad Of Halo Jones* was to be the story of a woman in the future – not particularly heroic or remarkable, but a star nonetheless.

The lack of heroism is somewhat fitting for an anthology best known for *Judge Dredd*, but Moore was also attempting to do more, to break down the stereotypes of women in comics as half-naked and as an adornment to the male cast.

Halo Jones broke the mould, becoming a success with male and female readers alike. A cracking sci-fi adventure story in a realistic yet mind-boggling future universe of interstellar travel and all-too-familiar wars, it's the story of an ordinary young woman who decides to put herself out into the bigger universe and struggles with the consequences. It's one of the bravest stories 2000 AD ever told.

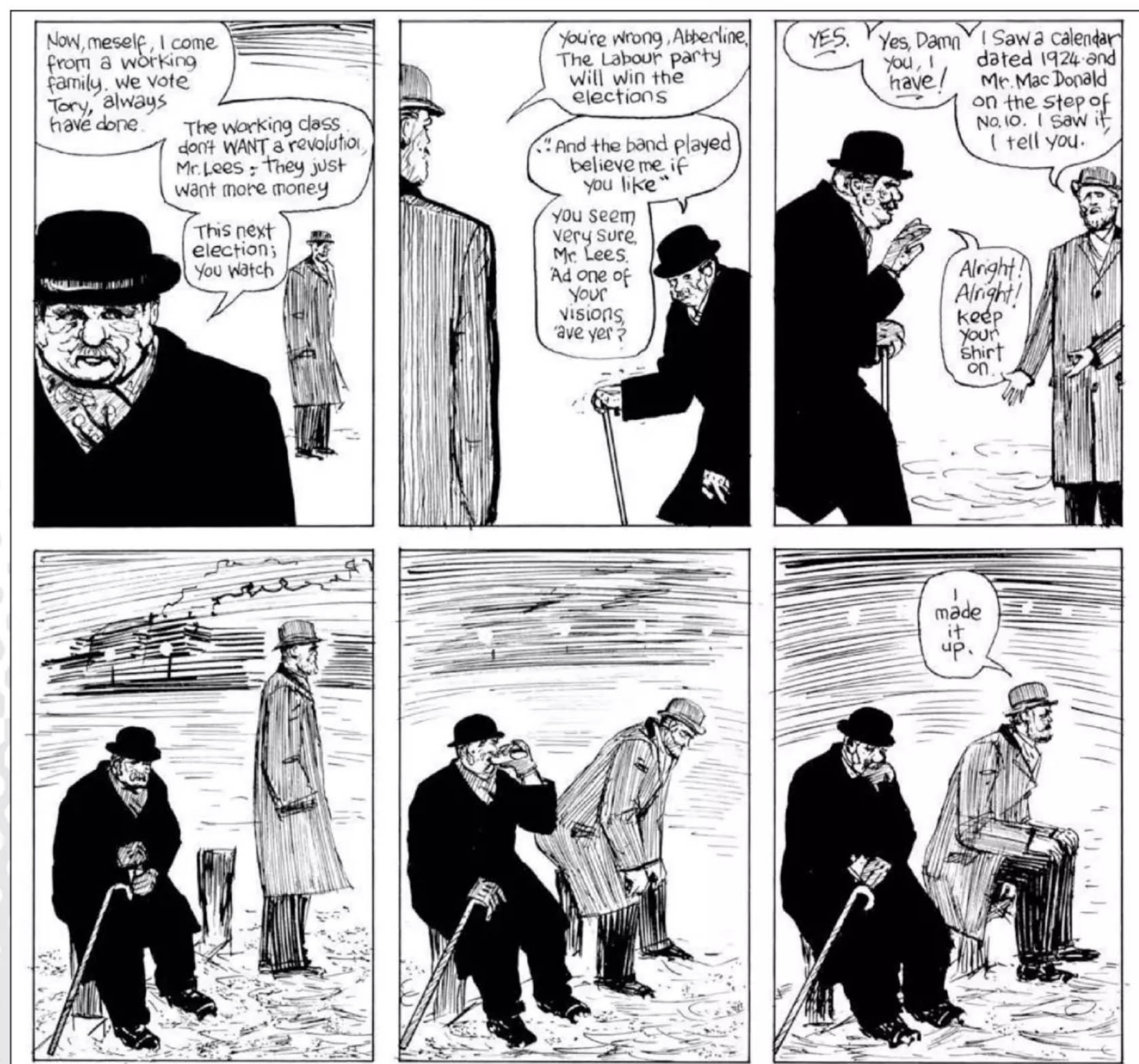
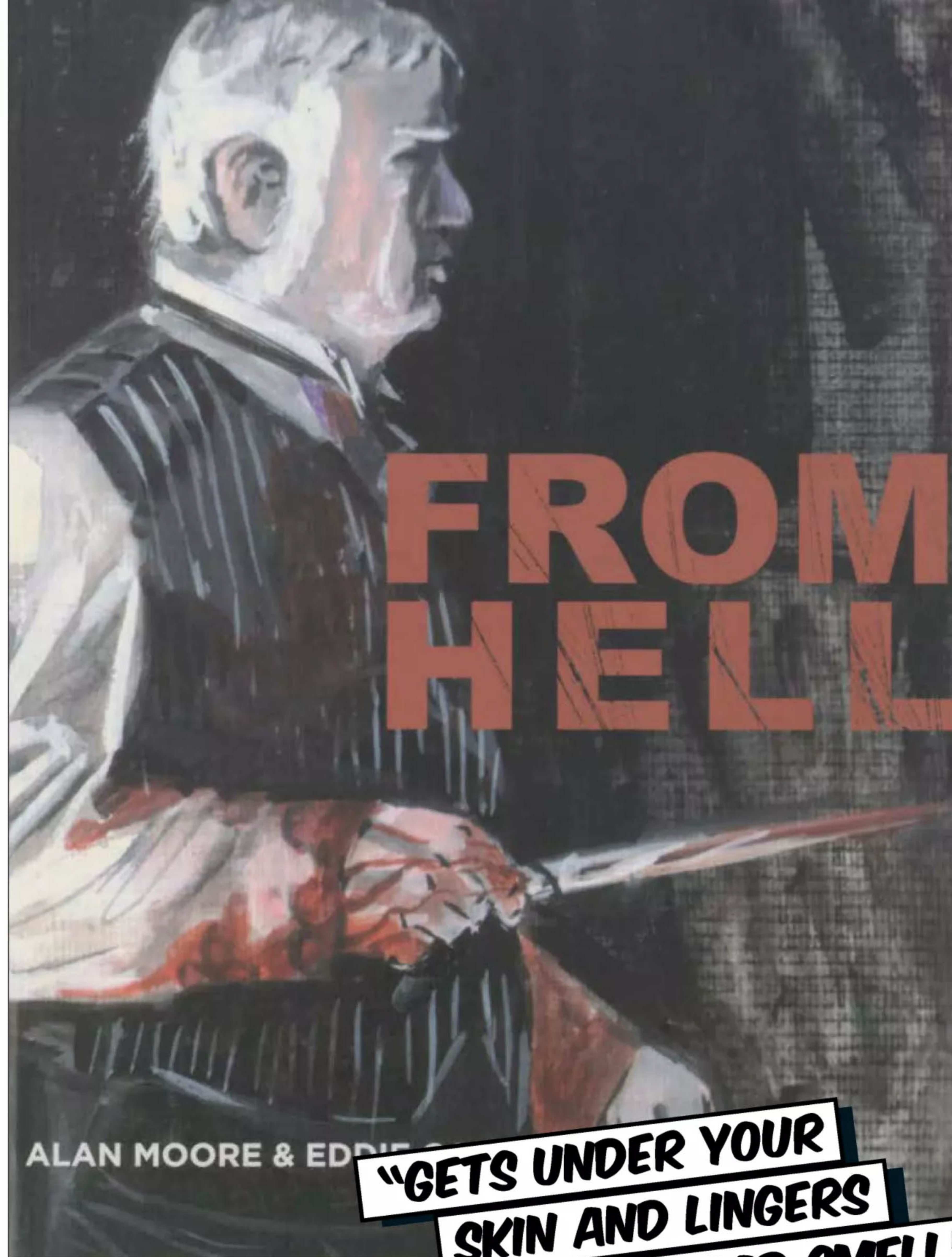


FROM HELL

Details Originally published From Hell #1-10 (1989-96) **Publisher** Knockabout Comics **Writer** Alan Moore **Artist** Eddie Campbell **Collected in** From Hell **Available digitally** TBC

The line between exhaustive and exhausting is walked carefully by Alan Moore in the doorstep that is the collected *From Hell*. Moore and artist Eddie Campbell spent years creating the definitive and incredibly detailed take on Jack the Ripper and the circumstances and environment that spawned him.

The hunt for Jack, led by Inspector Abberline, is less important than the journey of the lunatic killer William Gull. The Queen's surgeon takes to his mission with religious fervour, but his inspirations are drawn from the centuries of history under London's streets and mystic forces no one can understand. In one of the series' most compelling sequences, he takes his coach driver Netley on a tour of the city, explaining the significance of its landmarks. Moore's dialogue combined with Campbell's stark, vivid black and white artwork creates an atmosphere of almost unbearable claustrophobia. What makes *From Hell* great isn't that it's a great serial killer story; it's a study of a city in the grip of a madman that gets under your skin and lingers like a bad smell.



IKILLGIANTS™

I KILL GIANTS

Details Originally published *I Kill Giants* #1-7 (2008-09) **Publisher** Image
Writer Joe Kelly **Artist** JM Ken Niimura **Collected in** *I Kill Giants: Fifth Anniversary*
Edition Available digitally Comixology

Some of the best books from Image have been by superhero writers and artists, looking to indulge their own creative expression that bit further. So it is with *I Kill Giants*, written by Joe Kelly – previously best known for his work at DC and Marvel, from *Deadpool* to *Superman* and everyone in between – and drawn by the brilliant JM Ken Niimura.

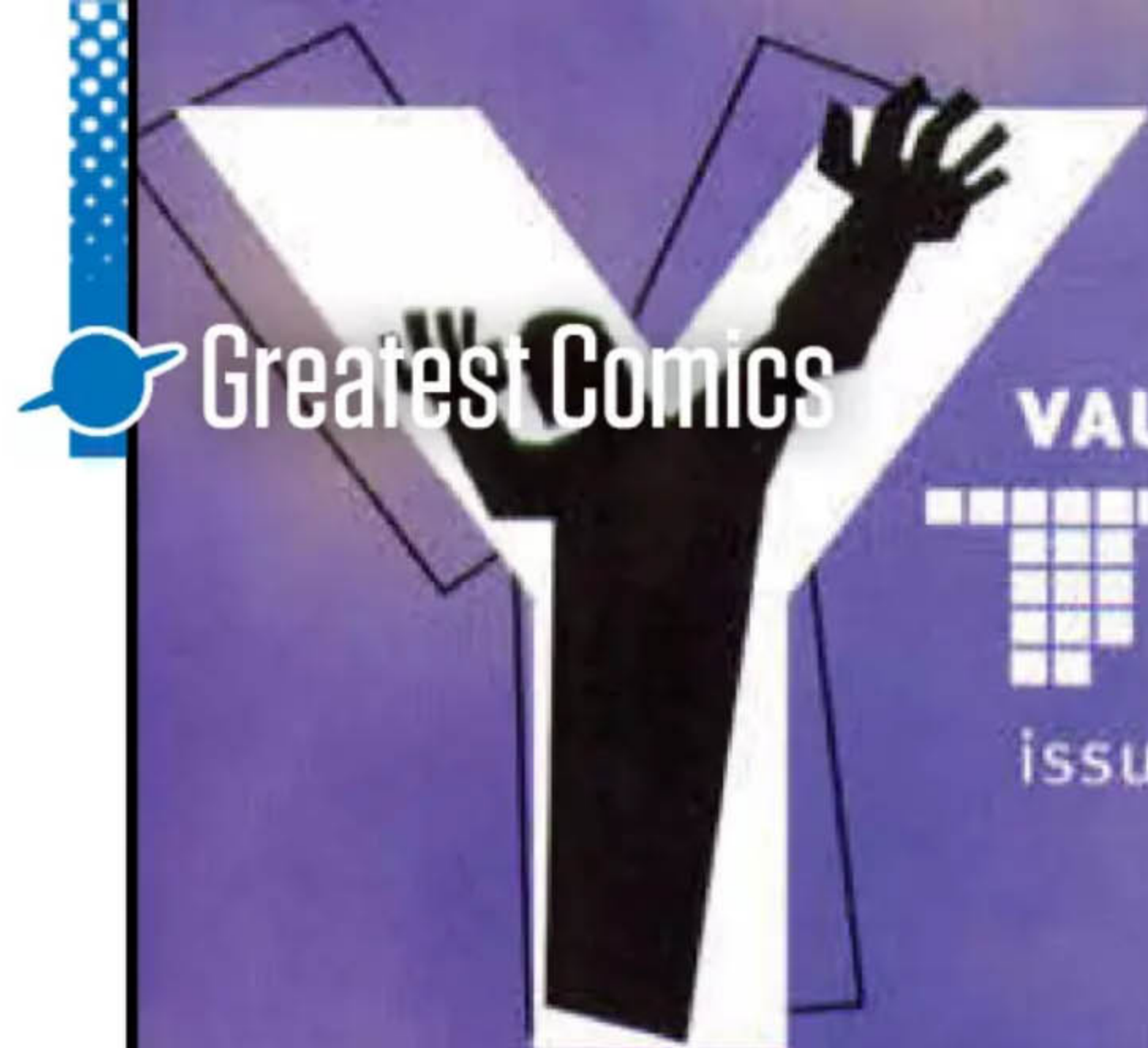
This title is something very special, and a description demands no spoilers – this book must be experienced first-hand, quite probably in one frantic read, before re-reading time and time again.

Barbara Thorson is an outsider – not that trendy type of outsider who is secretly cool and has lots of friends, but an acerbic fifth-grader completely consumed with her fantasy world. Convinced that giants are real, and that they are coming, she gets ready for the coming battle, even as she is labelled a social misfit. But what trouble is really on the horizon, and could the giants possibly be real?

This isn't just a comic for little girls or fans of fantasy. It isn't even just for fans of comics. *I Kill Giants* is utterly, hopelessly for every single reader out there. You won't be the same after reading this comic; we really mean it.

**"UTTERLY, HOPELESSLY
FOR EVERY READER OUT THERE"**





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THE LAST MAN

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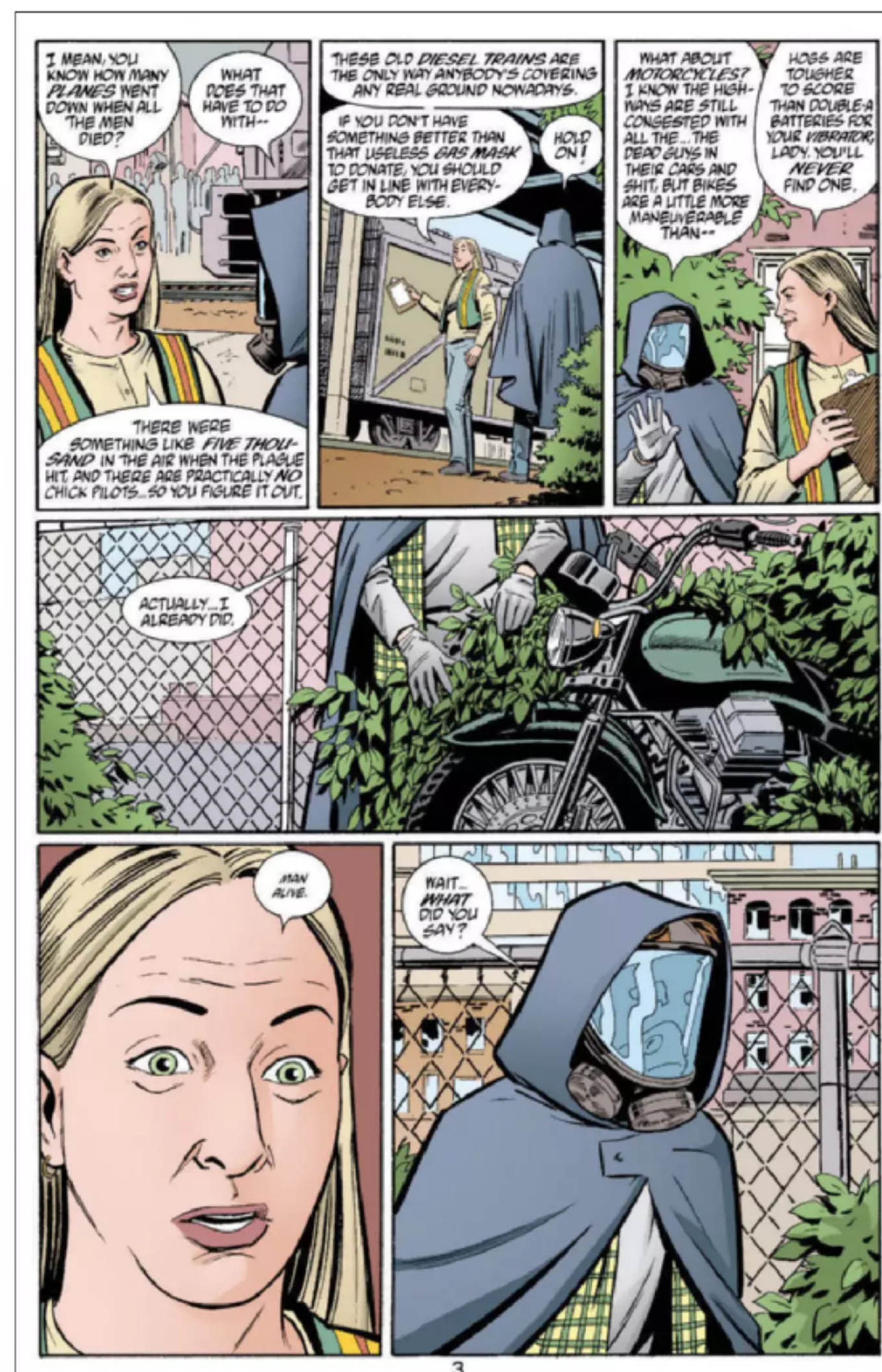
Y: THE LAST MAN

Details Originally published *Y: The Last Man* #1-60 (2002-08) **Publisher** Vertigo **Writer** Brian K Vaughan **Artists** Pia Guerra, Goran Sudžuka, Paul Chadwick **Collected in** *Y: The Last Man - Unmanned* **Available digitally** Comixology

Y: The Last Man is a comic-book series that would lend itself so perfectly to a series of films or TV series that the only explanation that it hasn't yet been adapted is that nobody wants to be the one to mess it up.

Brian K Vaughan's genius high concept confronts humanity with a plague that wipes out every man on the planet – with the exception of Yorick, an escape artist, and Ampersand, his pet capuchin monkey. Together with Agent 355, the two travel to find the only scientist who might understand why he's still alive, but can they keep ahead of the different factions who want the last two males on Earth?

Vaughan's gift for blending pop culture references and high concept sci-fi with real emotional weight has propelled him to the upper echelon of American comics writers, but *Y: The Last Man* remains his towering achievement. Together with artist Pia Guerra, he creates a post-apocalypse that's bright and accessible, but carries a real weight to it that forces us to feel every loss. It's a funny and hugely exciting adventure, but the stakes are incredibly high.



PREACHER: GONE TO TEXAS

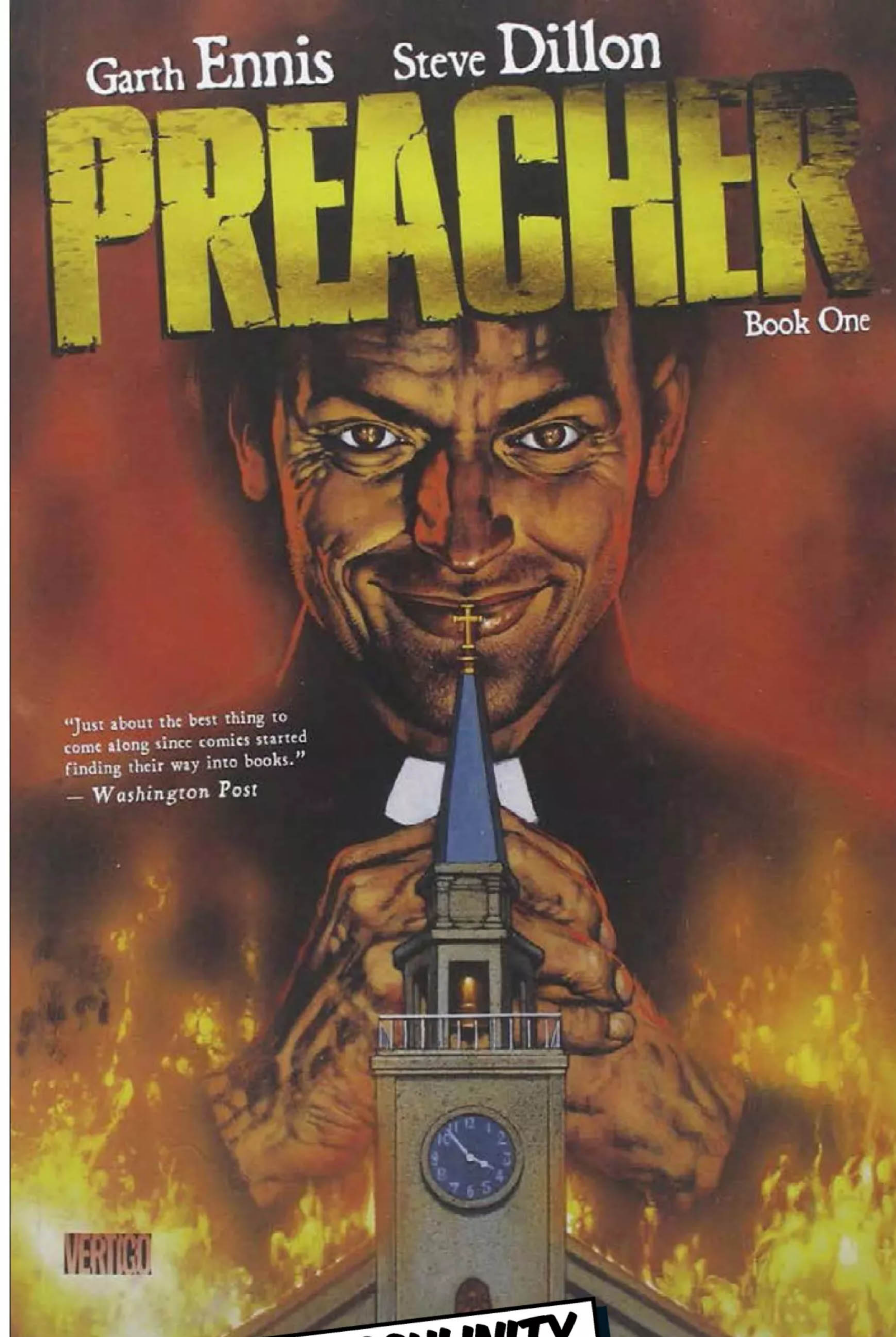
Details Originally published Preacher #1-7 (1995-96) **Publisher** DC/Vertigo
Writer Garth Ennis **Artist** Steve Dillon **Collected in** Preacher: Gone to Texas
Available digitally Comixology (individual issues only)

We'll just come out and say it: *Preacher* is underrated. It tends to be unfairly written off as a shock-and-gore fest.

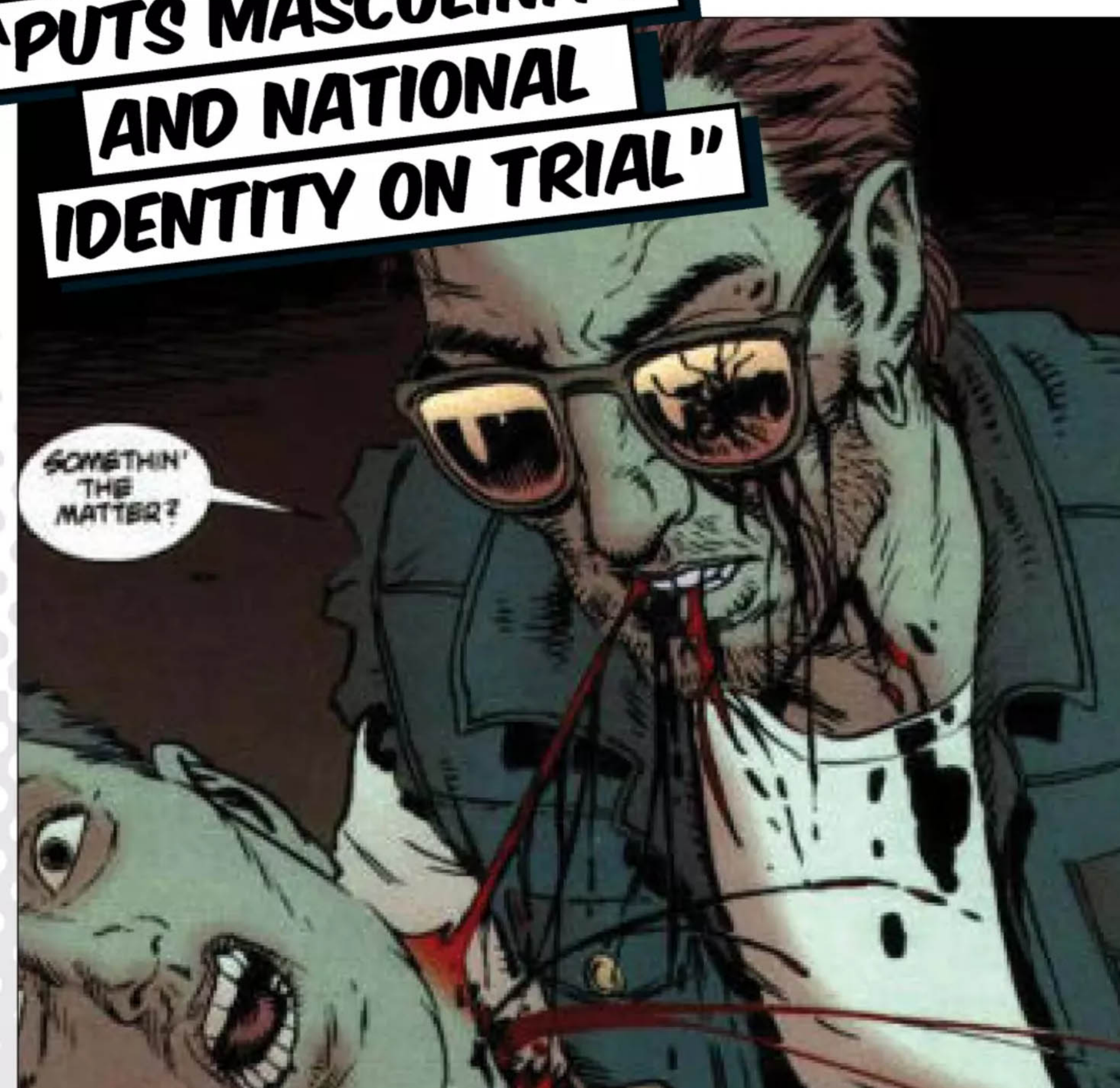
True, we do get a character named Arseface, lots of viscera and gratuitously bizarre sex. Under all that blood, however, is a fascinating mix of genres and cultural influences that you won't see anywhere else.

Preacher: Gone To Texas introduces us to Jesse, a disillusioned preacher who speaks with the power of the Word of God; Tulip, his gun-toting ex-girlfriend, and Cassidy, an Irish vampire whose roguish charm hides ugly secrets. It's a full-blast combination of horror, Westerns, modern action thrillers and a twisted take on religion. What follows is an epic where Americana collides with entrenched Irish and Old World tradition, and which puts conventional concepts of masculinity and national identity on trial.

And this seven-issue story arc is where it all starts. Until now it had remained untouched by Hollywood, and we will sit nervously until we are shown that it has been translated well to the screen. Fingers crossed.



**"PUTS MASCULINITY
AND NATIONAL
IDENTITY ON TRIAL"**



CRIMINAL: THE LAST OF THE INNOCENTS

Details Originally published *Criminal*: Vol 6 - #1-4 (2011) **Publisher** Icon
Writer Ed Brubaker **Artist** Sean Phillips **Collected in** *Criminal*: Vol 6, *The Last Of The Innocents* **Available digitally** N/A

There's a real lack of crime-noir comics on the shelves, and that could be due – in part, at least – to the insane level of quality that surrounds the genre. Ed Brubaker and Sean Phillips' *Criminal* represents something of a best in show, phenomenal writing meets dark, shadowy art that sells the concept immediately.

The duo have released a handful of graphic novels set in the *Criminal* universe, but *The Last Of The Innocents* might be their most ambitious. Each arc focuses on a different story of crime and corruption, so feel free to read them out of order. *The Last Of The Innocents* is just as brutal and bloody as any other story in the series, but it's as it takes on an adult adaptation of comic strip *Archie* where it truly shines. A dark world becomes even more bleak against the backdrop of *Archie*'s colourful, almost idyllic world – and that just makes it harder to bear when it hits the fan.

If you're looking for your first taste of crime comics, don't look any further.

The Last Of The Innocent

Introduction by Patton Oswalt





THE FATHER OF DREDD

THE CREATOR OF THE LAWMAN OF THE FUTURE, HE HAS OVERSEEN 35 YEARS OF EXPLOSIVE, POIGNANT AND INFLAMMATORY STORYLINES. JUDGE DREDD CO-CREATOR JOHN WAGNER GIVES HIS VIEW ON ALEX GARLAND'S DREDD AS WELL AS OFFERING A DAMNING INDICTMENT ON THE WORLD TODAY...



It's not often that a film director will truly welcome the input of another creator on their work, but then it's not often that the creator in question is one of the two men responsible for revolutionising UK comics and supplying the US with some of their

best writers. John Wagner joined *2000 AD* in the very early stages, and created the anthology comic's longest running strip: *Judge Dredd*.

Set 100 years in the future and progressing in real time (meaning the character is now over 70, kept in peak condition by future technology and sheer determination), Dredd helped set the tone for a new, grittier time in comics; a biting commentary on the various political situations of the era. Wagner, born in the US but brought up as a proud Scot, is charming, friendly, blackly humoured and very to the point. Hints of Dredd, then, but without the bastard parts...

You had some quibbles about the new Dredd film during its production, but does the final cut get the Wagner seal of approval?

I'm right behind it. My problems stemmed, I guess, from never having seen a film in production. I didn't know they could do so much with it between the rough cut and final version. It's like the difference between seeing an artist's rough pencils and the final inked and coloured art. I admit I was worried when I went up to see it the last time – if I wasn't happy with it I couldn't give it my support, and I knew that would hurt it. This time it picked me up and carried me right along with it, and I'm thinking "Yeah, go!" I was so relieved. The people at DNA aren't like our idea of the breed. They're honest and straightforward and they put a lot of hard work into getting things right, in this case into making sure Dredd was Dredd. I wanted them to succeed.

Alex Garland and Karl Urban are both big fans. Does this shine through in the film?

One of the good things about working with Alex was that he understood Dredd, so I wasn't always fighting to keep him true to character. Karl – sometimes his resemblance to my image of Dredd is uncanny. If there's to be a follow up I hope he will be available.

The 1995 Stallone film was visually astonishing, but didn't have much in common with the tone of the Judge Dredd comics. Is the new film different in that respect, and does the low budget actually help a little in that regard?

I don't know if the budget helped, but it didn't particularly harm it. They could have thrown another \$100 million at it and it might have looked a bit flashier, but it wouldn't have altered the core of the story, which is pretty much pure Dredd – lean and mean.

Alex Garland was very open to your feedback, including cutting a kiss scene between Dredd



"THE MORE I SEE THE PEOPLE AT THE TOP OF SOCIETY, THE MORE I WANT TO RESIGN FROM THIS WORLD"
JOHN WAGNER

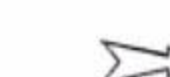
and Judge Anderson. Has it been a good experience helping your character appear on screen?

Yes, it has been very enjoyable. For a start they offered me a little respect, which didn't happen on either of the other two films I've been involved with. I don't think [David] Cronenberg even knew that *A History Of Violence* came from [John Wagner and Vincent Locke's 1997] graphic novel till near the end of filming. Alex can be pretty hard to shift at times – naturally, a writer has to believe in his work – but still, he was more than willing to listen, and on a lot of matters I had to accept that he knew the film business and I didn't. He understood what was possible and what would work. For my own part, I'm not that precious about my work. If they've got to change things, so be it, just don't lose what's good about it. That's why I hated the Stallone *Dredd* and liked *A History Of Violence* – they at least didn't rip the heart out of the story.

Olivia Thirlby's portrayal of Judge Anderson and Lena Headey's villain may well see more female fans picking up 2000 AD titles. Anderson is your creation, and one of the few strong women in comics who are not defined by romance or men – was this deliberate?

Absolutely. I don't mind romance in stories, but I don't need the message hammered home, so when things get too lovey-dovey my finger heads for the fast forward button. Sex, I would only use where it was an integral part of the story, for instance in 'America' or the DeMarco story. I don't know about Anderson's romantic life and, for the moment anyway, I don't want to know. It would demean her to give it too much weight.

You've described Judge Dredd in the past as "a heartless hero for Thatcher's heartless new Britain." Is he as relevant today as he was back then?



➤ What horrifies me – no, let's say disgusts me – is people, or more precisely people in power, those at the 'top' of society. The more I see of them the more I want to resign from the world. That's why I live as a virtual recluse, only reachable by an eight-day wagon ride. I don't think the situation today is any worse than it has been over the centuries; the people at the top are still the same.

Judge Dredd is an antihero, a villain even sometimes, in an authoritarian horror future. Do you think that sense of anarchic satire will be evident to film goers and new readers, or will he be seen as a hero?

Satire's not a major element in the story. Dredd's pretty much the hero here, but a hero with an edge, a man with first-class honours in intimidation. It comes over in the way that Karl holds himself and in Alex's nicely terse dialogue.

'America' is one of the most political stories. What was the motivation behind that arc? Could you see it being a good story for a film?

In 'America', I wanted to cover a broad swathe of Mega-City life, to present a truly rounded picture of how things are. It was designed for the launch of the *Judge Dredd Magazine*. The feeling was the lead Dredd story had to be something special, a more 'adult' view of Dredd's world – as good, I was told, as *The Dark Knight Returns* ("c'mon, guy, you can do it!"). I'm not making any claims in that direction – *Batman: Year One* was the better story anyway. In fact, it's my all-time favourite comic story – but I do take a certain pleasure that the late Pete Root, no bad judge, once told me 'America' was the best strip he'd ever read.

You can't, of course, minimise the part Colin MacNeil's wonderful art played in the process. Without it, would 'America' be remembered so fondly? I doubt it. It's a real boost for a writer to work with an artist so committed to a story, and – horribly overused phrase –

truly at the peak of his powers. It's one of those stories, where it's simply wrong to say 'Wagner's America'. It has to be Wagner and MacNeil, Wagner and [Arthur] Ranson. They were true collaborations.

Dredd has changed over the years as a character, becoming more human, if still hard-edged. His characterisation has always been central – do you think this is key to his longevity?

I've always striven to keep Dredd the man constant and not allow the original vision to be diluted. That may be the real key to his staying power. Why screw around with something that works so well? So though he has changed – it adds a certain spice to things and it has certainly been useful in terms of story development – I haven't allowed him to change too much or too quickly. Alex Garland described the pace as glacial, and I think that's quite fast enough.

Is it challenging writing Judge Dredd after all this time?

You bet. It's much harder on the short stories, especially to find good ideas or new angles. These days, unless a promising idea pops into my head, I prefer to leave them to other, fresher minds. ☺

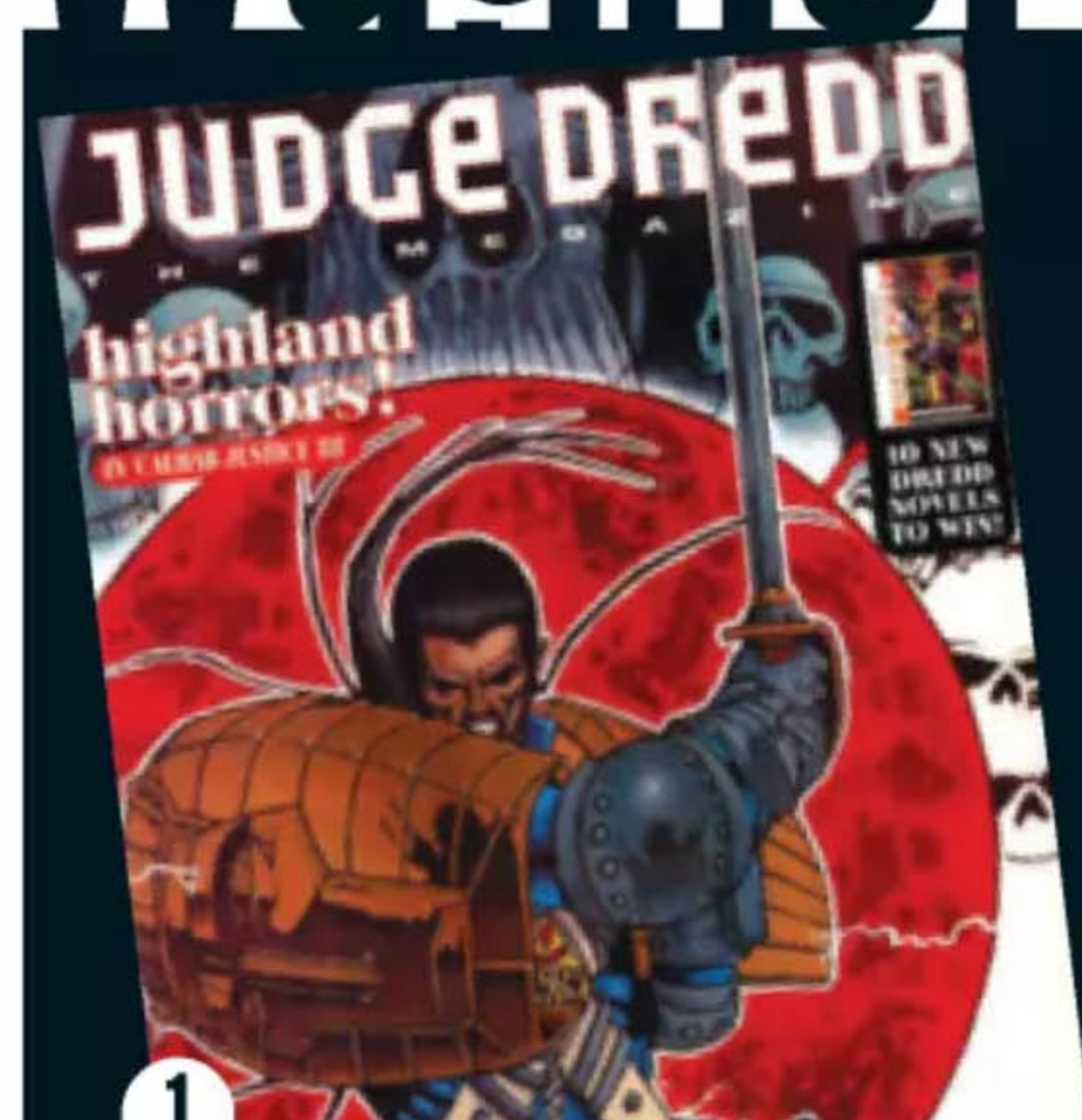
A near complete run of John Wagner's work can be found collected in Rebellion's ongoing *Judge Dredd: The Complete Case Files*, as well as weekly in *2000 AD* and monthly in the *Judge Dredd Magazine*.



"DREDD'S A HERO, BUT WITH FIRST-CLASS HONOURS IN INTIMIDATION"
JOHN WAGNER

Wagner's Most Wanted

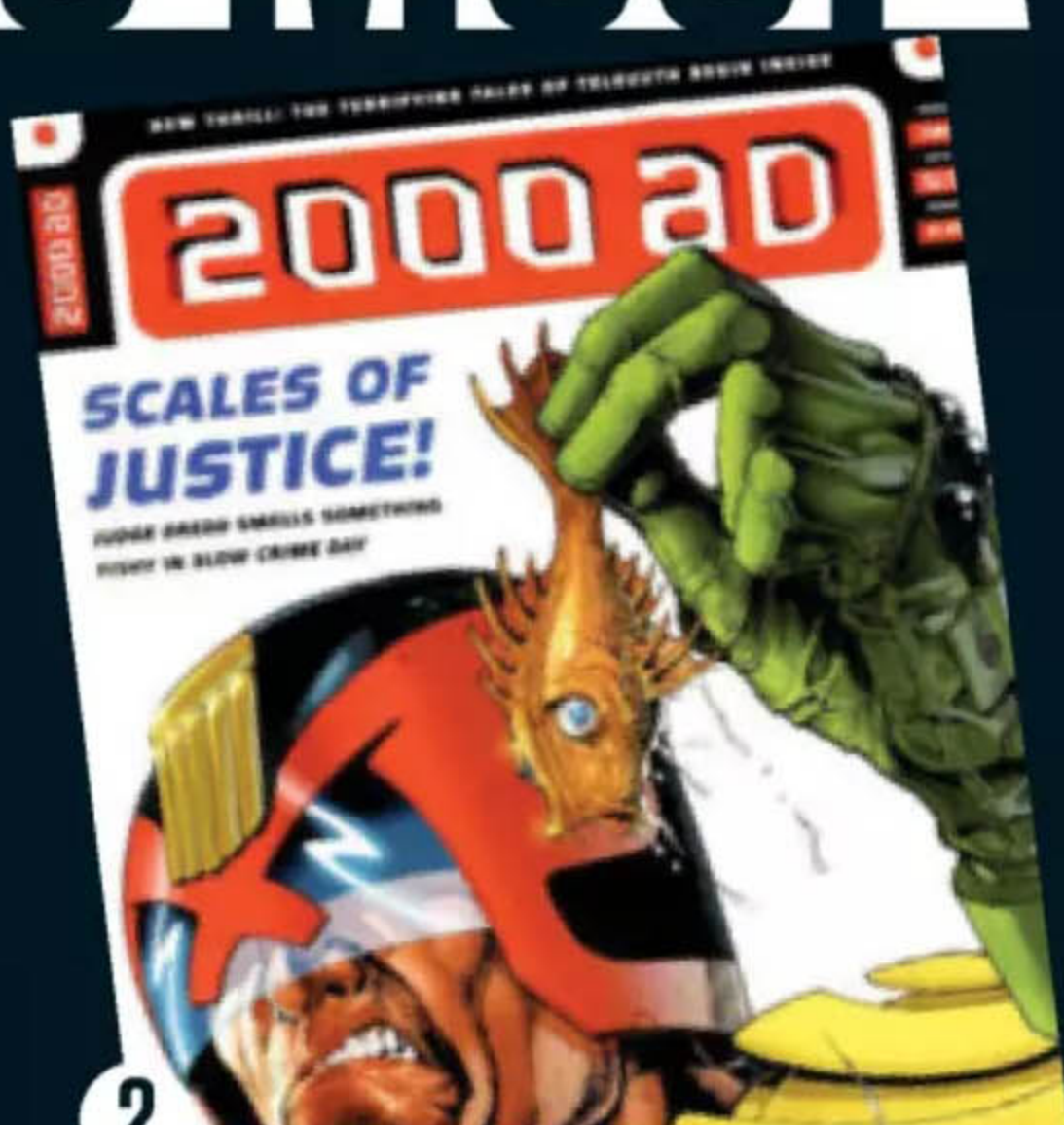
The co-creator's five favourite storylines and their sequel potential...



1 BURY MY KNEE AT WOUNDED HEART
Writer: John Wagner
Artist: Peter Doherty

If anyone tells you *Judge Dredd* strips can't convey emotion, give them this to read. It is often regarded by fans as the best story in Dredd history.

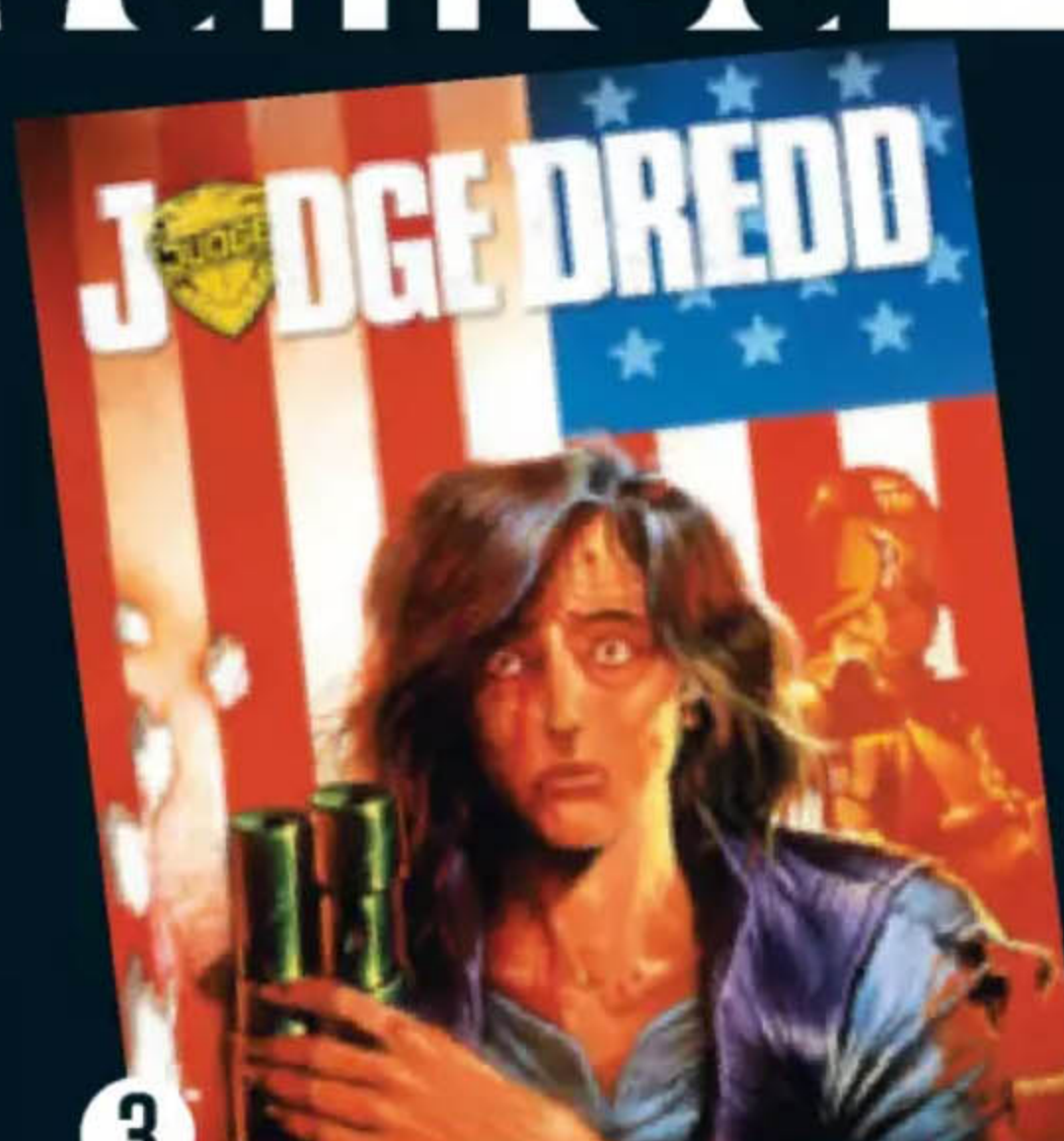
First appeared in *Judge Dredd Magazine* Volume 2 issue 46.



2 SLOW CRIME DAY
Writer: John Wagner
Artist: Peter Doherty

A single episode where the Judges go berserk after momentarily running out of crime. The art is fantastic, with the cover featuring Dredd threatening the readers, "Buy this comic or the fish gets it!"

Appeared in *2000 AD* prog 1,191.



3 AMERICA
Writer: John Wagner
Artist: Colin MacNeil

"'America' probably would make a good film" enthuses Wagner. "It may be a thought he [Alex Garland] is toying with, but there's so much to choose from that I doubt he'd tie himself down."

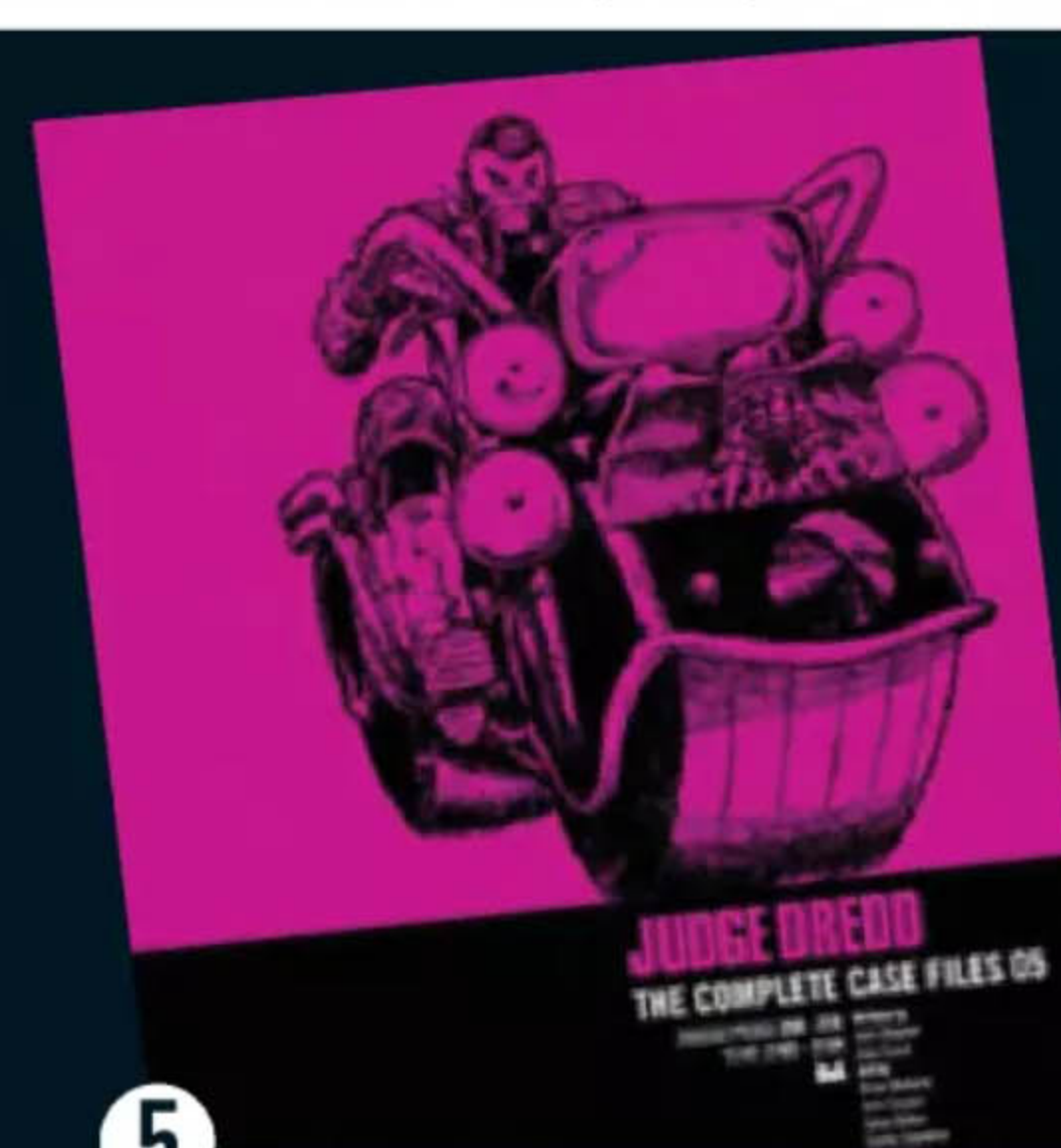
Collected in *Judge Dredd: America*, priced £11.99



4 NECROPOLIS
Writer: John Wagner
Artist: Carlos Ezquerro

The ultimate Judge Death saga and another potential sequel candidate. "On a visual level Death would be great," Wagner says, "but I'd understand if Alex decided not to go that way."

Collected in *Judge Dredd: The Complete Case Files 14* at £18.99.



5 BLOCK MANIA
Writers: John Wagner, Alan Grant
Artists: Mike McMahon, Brian Bolland

This classic block war gone wrong story is a timely read. The tension is high and the claustrophobia suffocating, but there's more to this than action.

Collected in *Judge Dredd: The Complete Case Files 5*, priced £13.99

APOCALYPSE WAR

BOOK 5

JUDGE DREDD: THE APOCALYPSE WAR

Details Originally published 2000 AD #245-270 (1982) **Publisher** Rebellion

Writers John Wagner, Alan Grant **Artist** Carlos Ezquerra **Collected in** Judge Dredd: The Complete Case Files 05 **Available digitally** 2000 AD

Trawling through nearly 40 years of Judge Dredd taking names, kicking ass, and sentencing perps to life in Iso-Cubes in 2000AD is an exhausting – not to mention intimidating – proposition. That's why you should save yourself the hassle and get your hands on *The Complete Case Files 05*.

This wonderful collection happens to contain two of the greatest Judge Dredd stories ever committed to print. Writers John Wagner and Alan Grant, joined by illustration from the ever-amazing Carlos Ezquerra, the creative team forged the template for every epic Dredd story that would follow. *The Apocalypse War* not only establishes Dredd as judge, jury and executioner of Mega City One, but as a threatening figure you simply would not want to be on the wrong side of.

It gets pretty dark, very quickly though it hasn't lost any of its bite over the years. With the Soviets invading, it doesn't take long for things to spiral out of control. Turf wars erupt in the streets, the threat of nuclear warfare ever-looming – this story establishes Dredd's love of the law, hatred of crime and corruption and his unwavering commitment to the city, no matter the cost.

**"ESTABLISHED DREDD
AS THE BADASS
HE IS TODAY"**



KRAVEN'S LAST HUNT

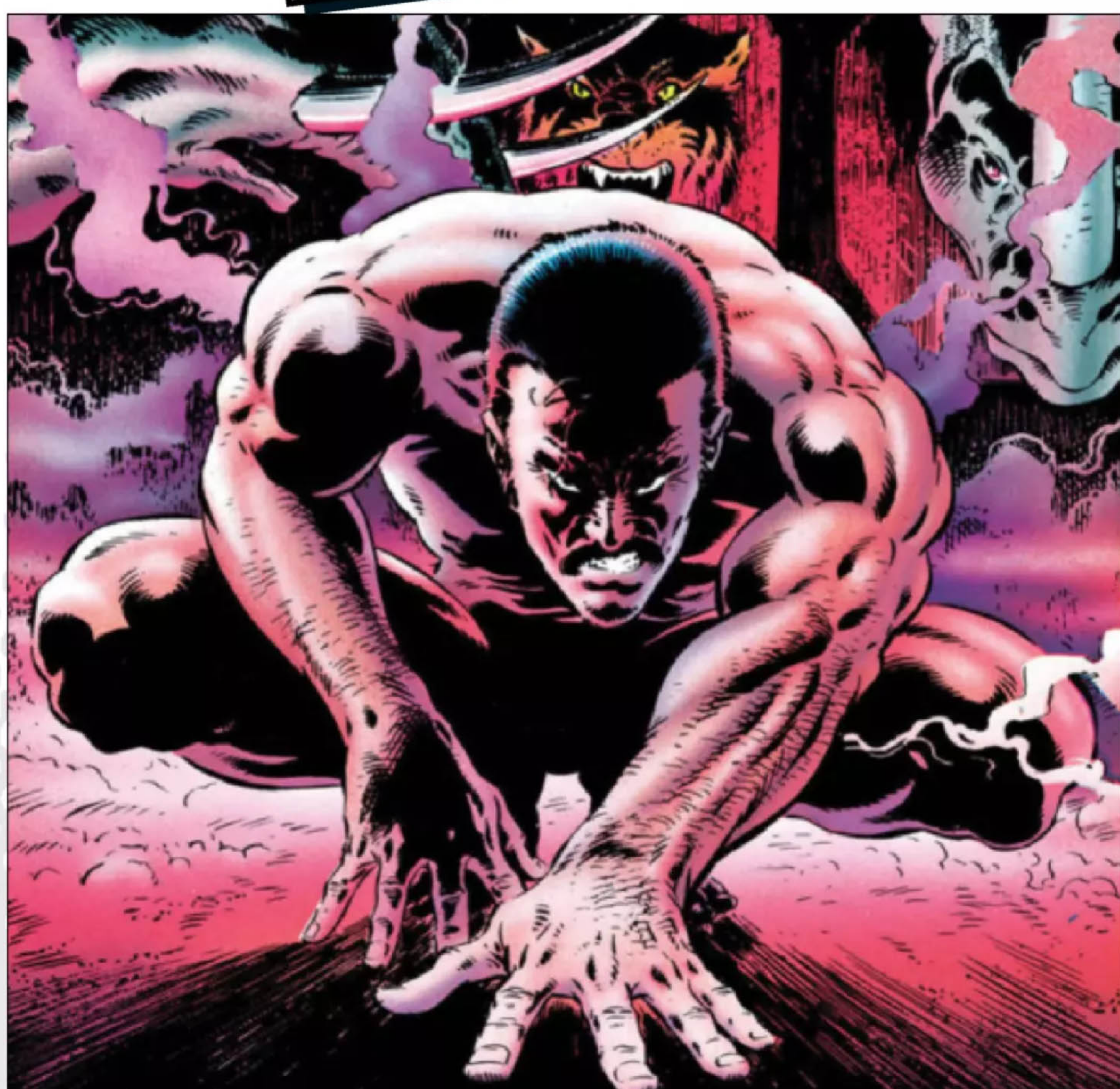
Details Originally published Web Of Spider-Man #31-32, The Amazing Spider-Man #293-294, The Spectacular Spider-Man #131-132 (1987) **Publisher** Marvel **Writer** JM DeMatteis **Artists** Mike Zeck **Collected in** Spider-Man: Kraven's Last Hunt (OOP) **Available digitally** Comixology, Marvel Unlimited

Now intense multi-title spanning arcs like *Kraven's Last Hunt* are the default setting for the Big Two, but in 1987 you could pick up *Kraven's Last Hunt* – set against the backdrop of Peter Parker's marriage to Mary-Jane Watson, the end of a more innocent era all in itself – and see DeMatteis' complex saga as a *Dark Knight Returns*-style mic-drop.

Arch-mythologist JM DeMatteis (with some input from the poetry of William Blake) delivers a shocking final word on the character that has Parker seemingly dead and in his wake, the legacy of the character is unpicked with a frenzied intensity when a less amicable soul takes on the mask – see Azbats, Cyborg Superman and more recently by Superior Spider-Man.

'Grim' isn't a word that sits at ease alongside all the quippin' and thwippin', but as a rhetorical device it proves there's more to Spidey than webbing up bank robbers.

"'GRIM' ISN'T A WORD THAT SITS AT EASE ALONGSIDE ALL THE QUIPPIN'"



KIKI DE MONTPARNASSE

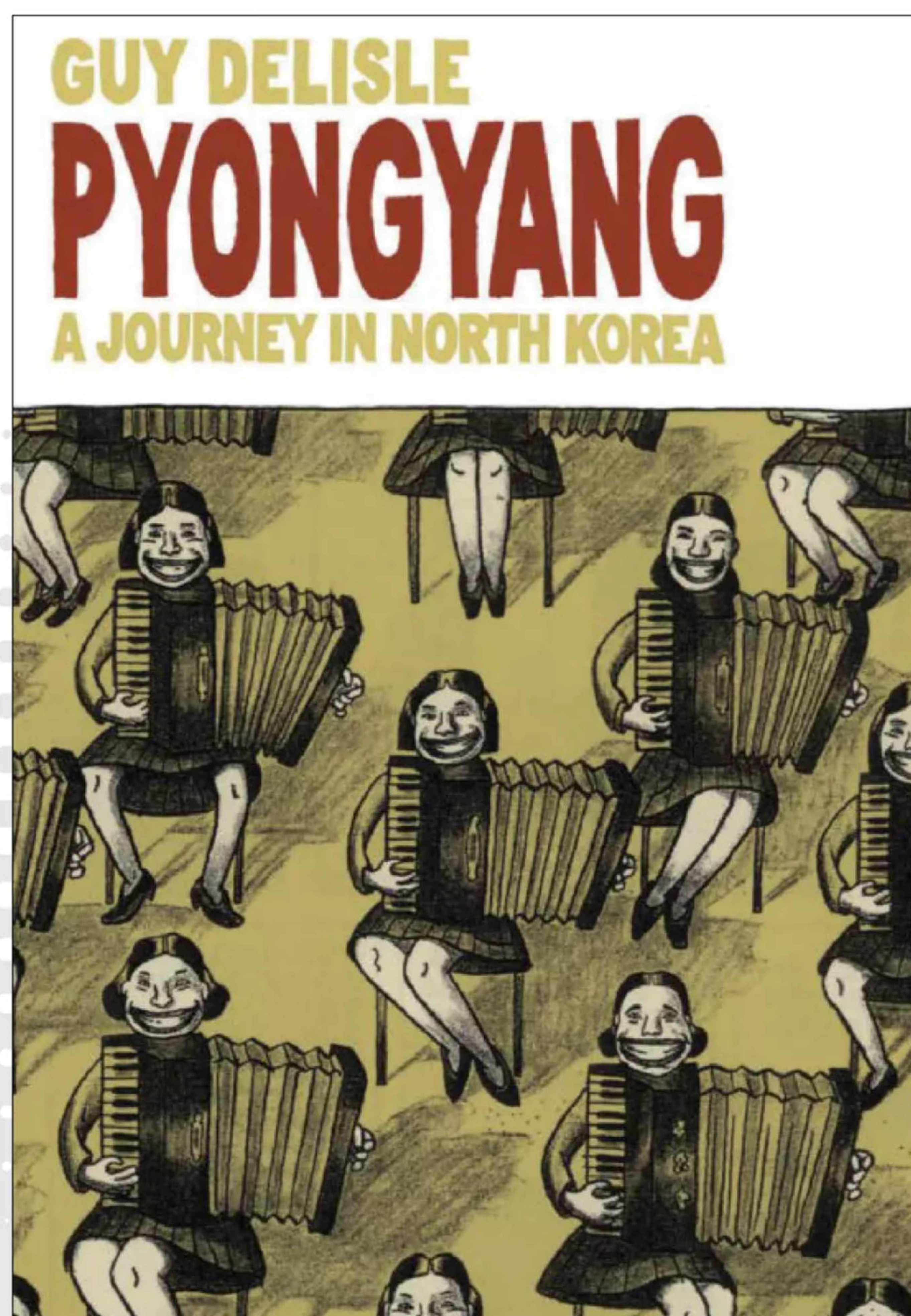
Details Originally published Kiki de Montparnasse (2007) **Publisher** Casterman, SelfMadeHero
Writer José-Louis Bocquet **Artist** Catel **Collected in** Kiki de Montparnasse **Available digitally** Sequential

Kiki de Montparnasse, born Alice Prin, moved far beyond her humble illegitimate French country beginnings to become one of the most famous bohemian models of the Jazz age. Muse to many of the period's greatest artists and partner of the famous photographer Man Ray (whose photo of Kiki is the inspiration for the cover), Kiki's ambition and independence made her one of the first emancipated women of the era.

While Kiki's biography is factually fascinating, the graphic medium is perfect for drawing out the true dazzling nature of the woman herself and the impact she had on the artistic set she surrounded herself with. Using charisma and sex to advance herself in life, Kiki wastes no time wallowing in shame or guilt, but throws herself full

force into enjoying life on her own terms – a remarkable feat at the time.

That same stubbornness and hedonistic lifestyle is not without its tragedies, but given Kiki's own memoirs were banned in the US upon release in 1929, this is an engaging, scandalous and bawdy treat.



PYONGYANG: A JOURNEY IN NORTH KOREA (2004)

Details Originally published Pyongyang (2004) **Publisher** Drawn and Quarterly **Writer** Guy Delisle
Artist Guy Delisle **Collected in** Pyongyang **Available digitally** N/A

An incidental record of life in the Hermit Kingdom, French-Canadian cartoonist Guy Delisle found himself spending two months working in Kim Jong-Il's insular and secretive North Korea, liaising between his own company and the Korean animation studio they outsourced some of the work too.

Merging history and politics with Bill Bryson-esque observations on life and culture and very mundane frustrations on trying to conduct business in the world's last bastion of glassy-eyed Soviet-style socialism, *Pyongyang* was the first of Delisle's idiosyncratic and insightful graphic travelogues translated into English.

Despite being followed by similar accounts of life in Jerusalem and Burma, *Pyongyang* is truly special. As a snapshot of world few Westerners get so see, no record like it exists in any medium, yet alone in comics.



DMZ

Details Originally published DMZ: On The Ground 1-5 (2006)

Publisher Vertigo **Writer** Brian Wood **Artist** Riccardo Burchielli

Collected in DMZ Vol 1: On The Ground

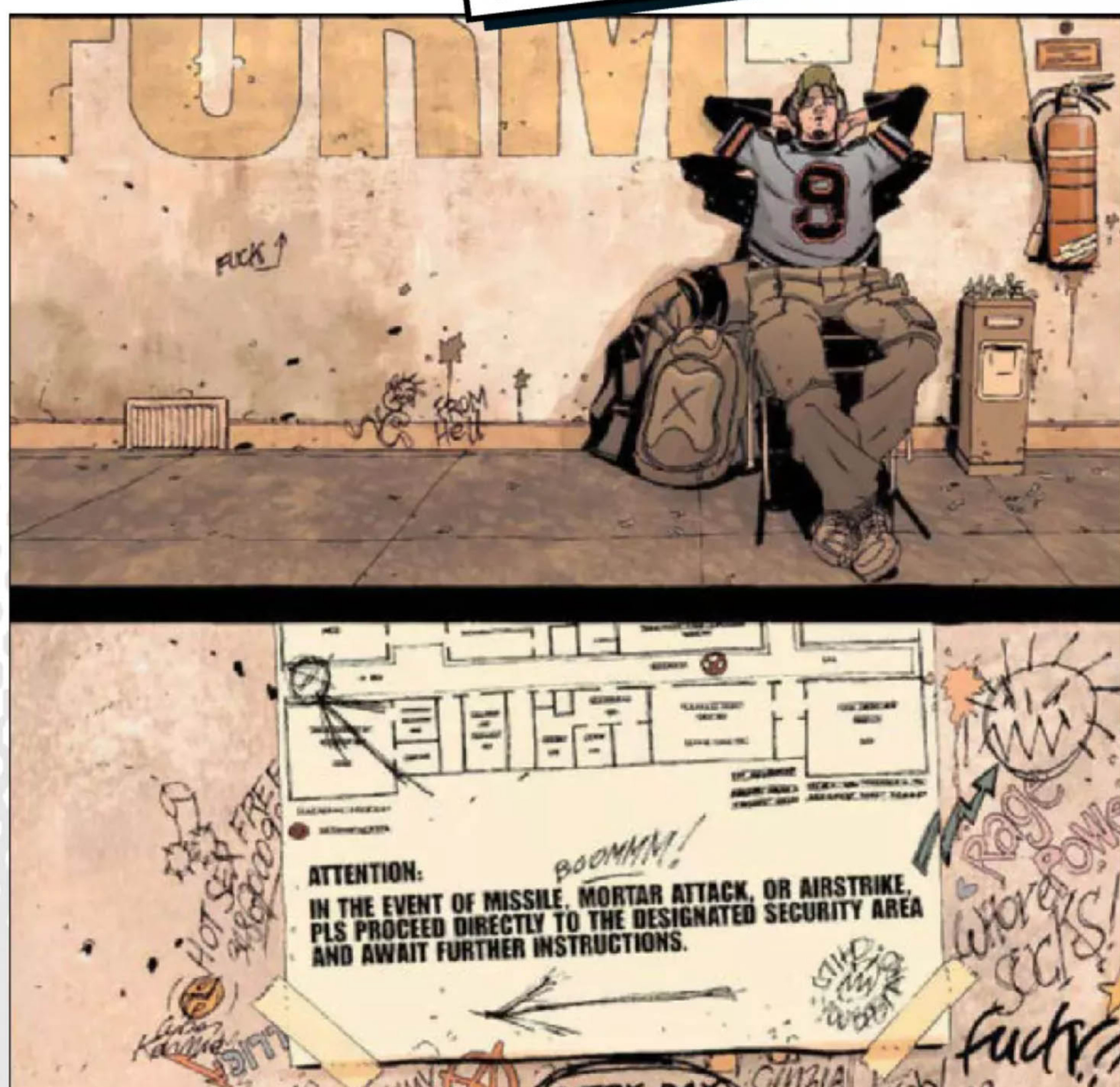
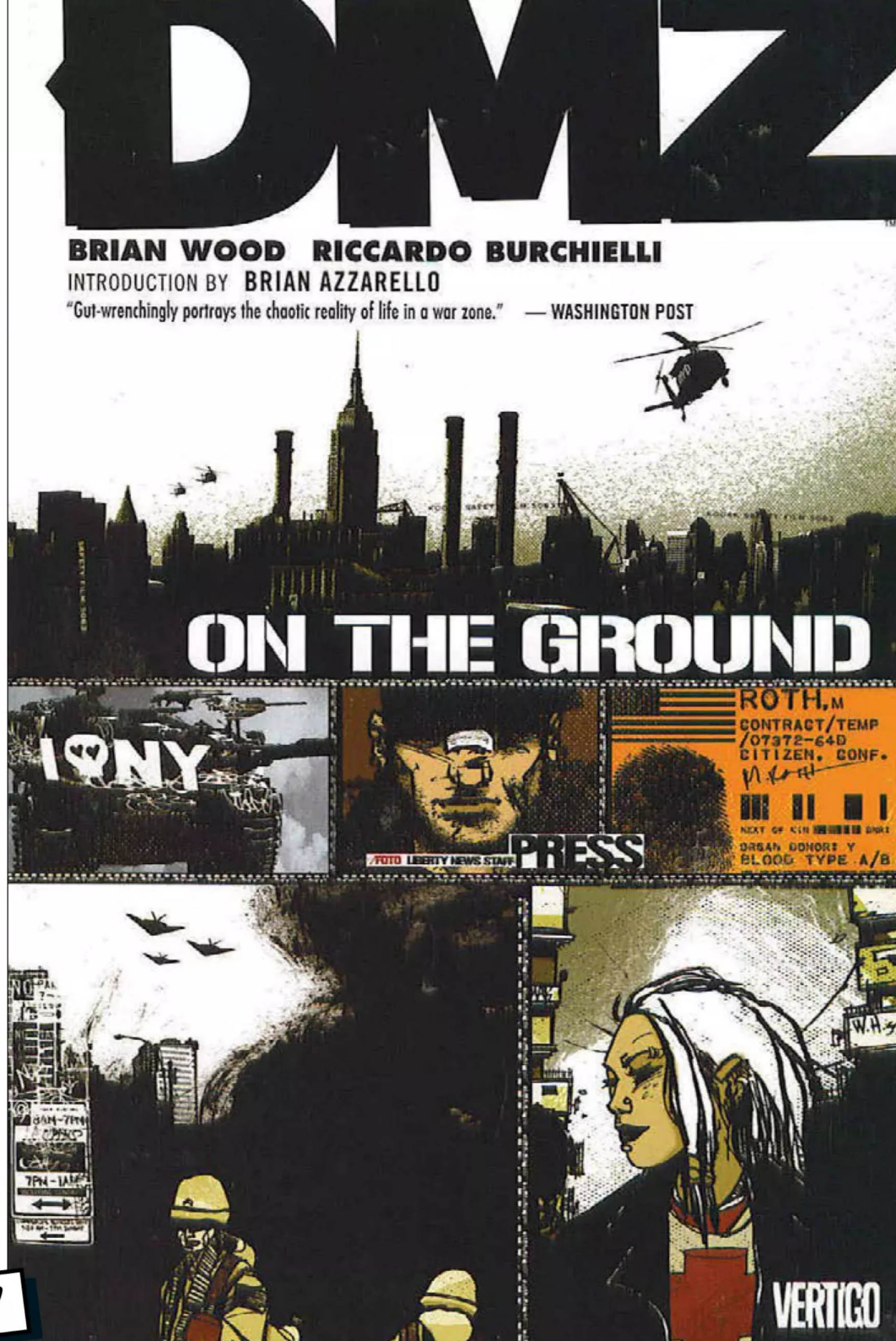
Available digitally Comixology

DMZ is a delicate exploration of terrorism in the modern age. In many respects it's the best post-9/11 comic-book to hit the stands, but we don't think it's essential simply because it looked to challenge. Brian Wood's *DMZ* depicted a United States ripped apart by civil war, one that has transformed Manhattan into a nightmarish demilitarised zone caught between the United States of America and The Free States.

Through the eyes of Matty Roth – a photojournalist in way over his head – *DMZ* explores the consequences that face a country that's laser-focused on fighting war overseas rather than containing domestic issues.

DMZ is a brave and addictive series; a compelling drama and cautionary tale that pulls the camera in on the people caught in the middle of yet another political struggle. Life in a war-torn city is brutal, and *DMZ* never flinches in its exploration beneath the rubble of New York City.

**"IT'S THE BEST POST-9/11
COMIC-BOOK ON
THE SHELVES"**



NEXT WAVE: AGENTS OF HATE

Details Originally published Nextwave #1-6 (2007) **Publisher** Marvel
Writer Warren Ellis **Artist** Stuart Immonen **Collected in** Nextwave Vol 1:
This Is What They Want **Available digitally** Comixology

Finding an essential graphic novel to read, that's easy – there are 100 in this book you currently hold in your hands. But finding one that is genuinely laugh-out-loud funny? Well, now that's something of a challenge. Conveying humour in comics is pretty difficult, but Warren Ellis nailed it as he unleashed his gloriously twisted, and wholeheartedly entertaining, parody of the Avengers and SHIELD

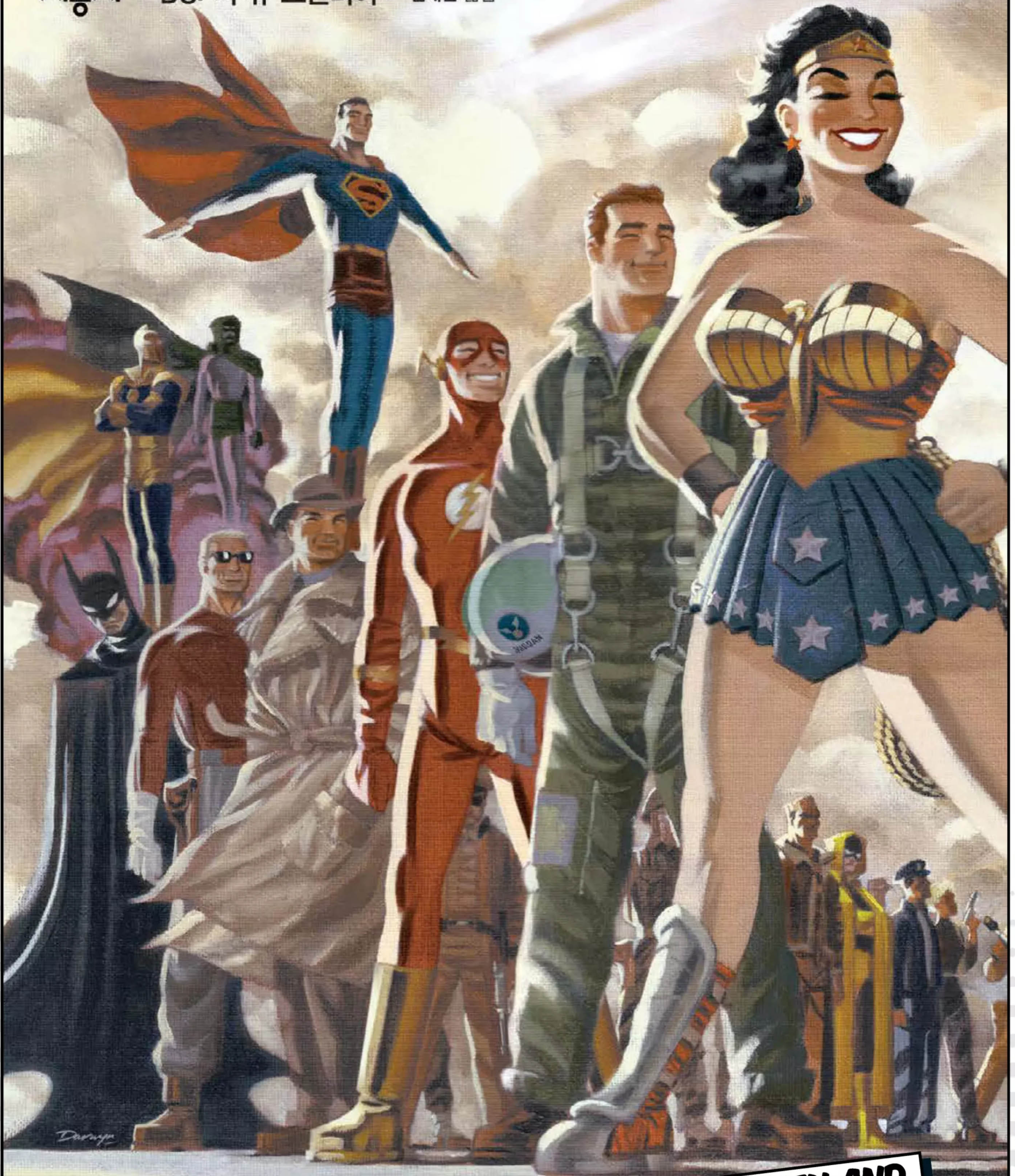
The Nextwave agents of HATE (that's the Highest Anti-Terrorism Effort, don't you know) are focused on the fight against Unusual Weapons Of Mass Destruction and, well, they get the job done, but they don't always get it done right. Some of Marvel's most beloved (and forgotten) superheroes team up to fight a variety of insane monsters and villains. It's extremely well written, looks freaking gorgeous, hilariously self-referential and unafraid to poke fun at the House of Ideas. Simply put, it might just be Marvel's funniest ever book.

**"MIGHT BE
MARVEL'S
FUNNIEST BOOK"**



DC: The New Frontier

VOLUME ONE



BY DARWYN COOKE

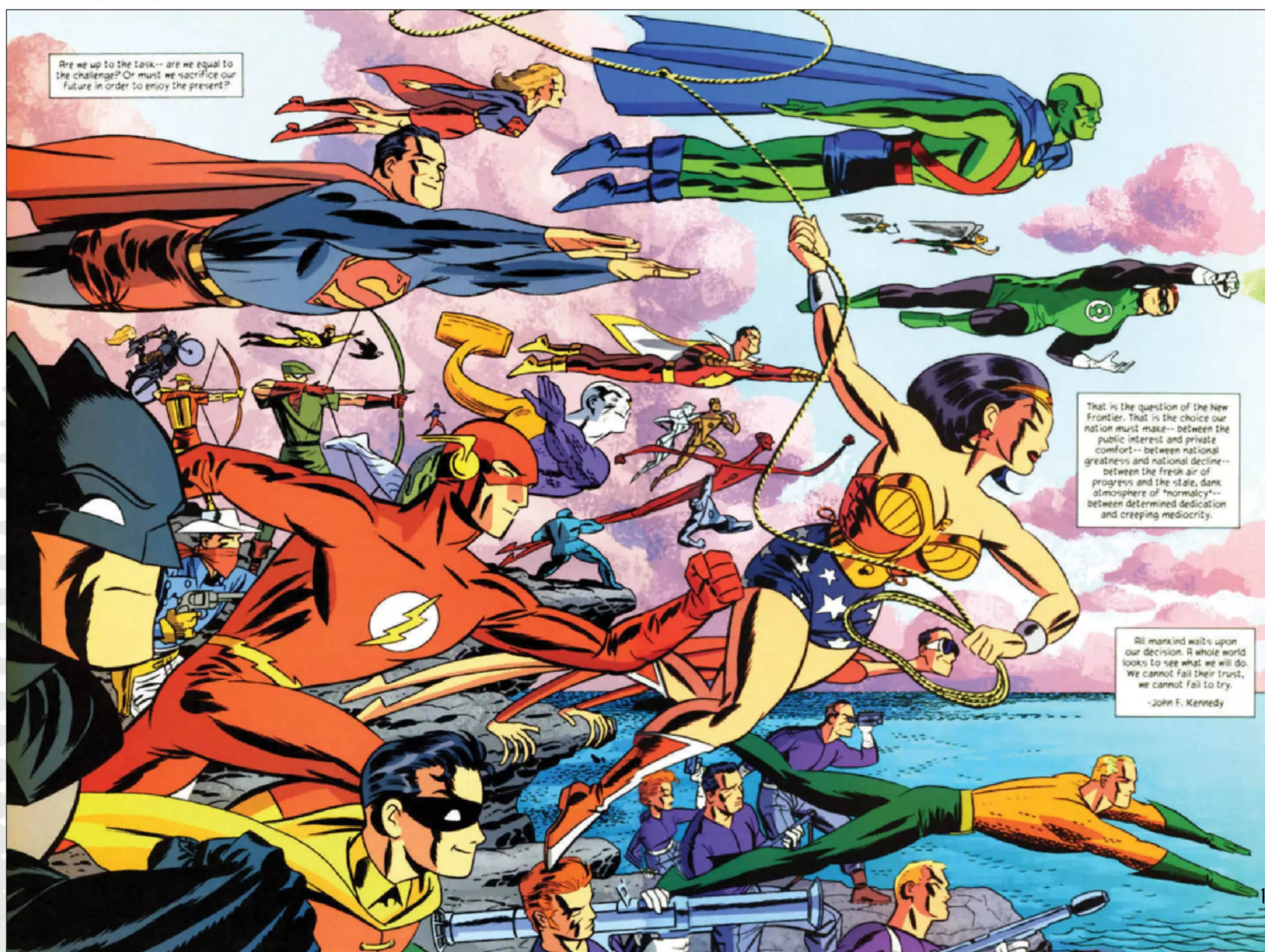
**"SHARPLY WRITTEN AND
UNDENIABLY GORGEOUS"**

DC: THE NEW FRONTIER VOL 1

Details Originally published DC: The New Frontier #1-6 (2004) **Publisher** DC **Writer** Darwyn Cooke
Artist Darwyn Cooke **Collected in** DC: The New Frontier - Vol 1 **Available digitally** Comixology

There's something utterly compelling about writer/illustrator Darwyn Cooke's gloriously retro rendition of the DC universe. While *The New Frontier* served as a bridge between the end of the Golden Age to the beginning of the Silver Age of DC comics, it's basically an opportunity to see your favourite superheroes team up in the Fifties.

The Age of the Superhero is in decline following the conclusion of World War II, and it is every hero for themselves as fear spreads through America at the height of the Cold War. While *Watchmen* detailed how a team of heroes can implode under their own egos, this explores how they can triumph. *The New Frontier* is a sharply written and undeniably gorgeous – and honestly, you won't likely find another book that manages to so effortlessly pay homage to the legends of the industry – like Jack Kirby and Bruce Timm – while still looking completely unlike anything else on the shelves.



THE MAN OF STEEL

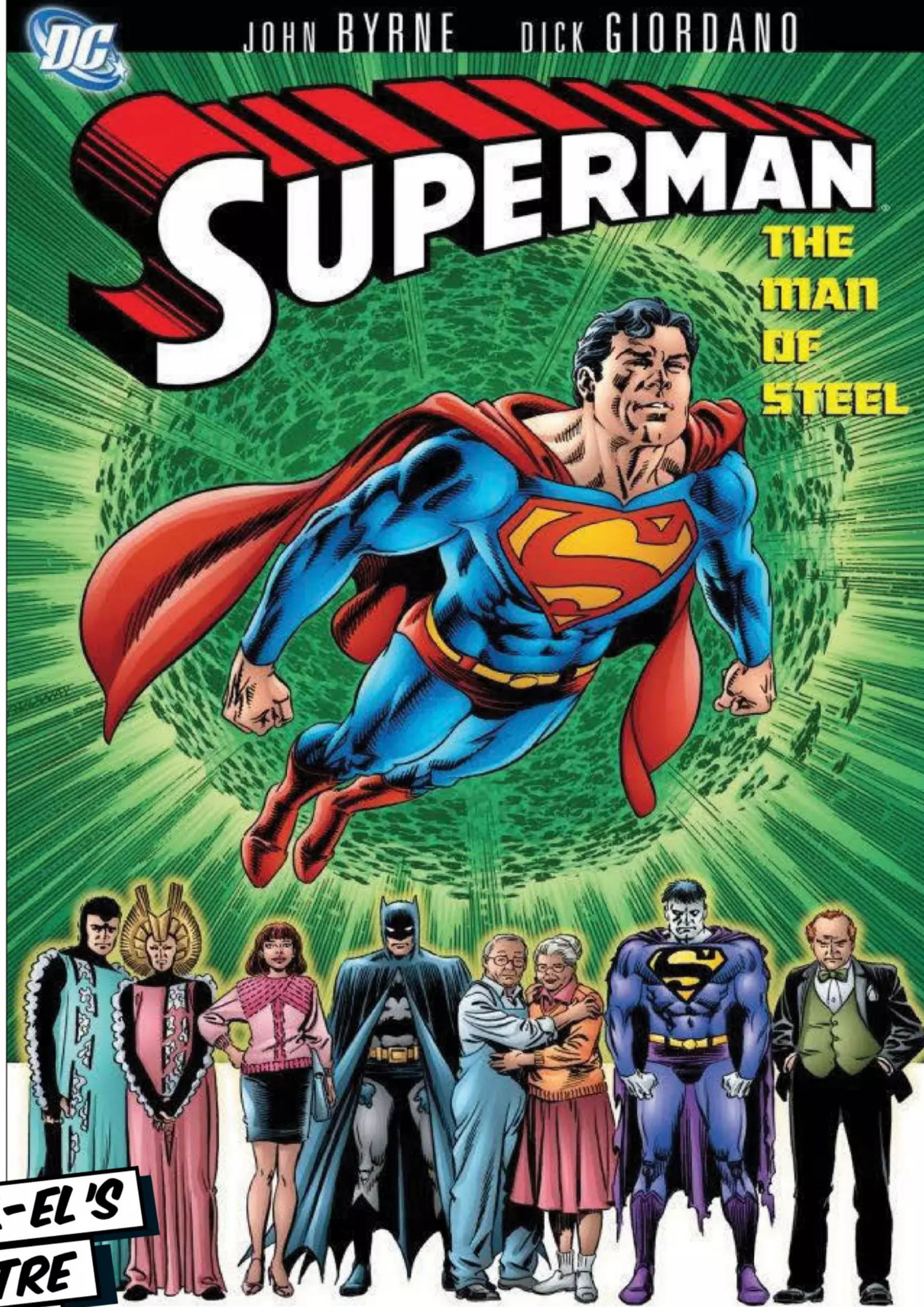
Details Originally published Superman: The Man of Steel #1-6 (1986)
Publisher DC **Writer** John Byrne **Artists** John Byrne **Collected in** Superman:
 The Man Of Steel **Available digitally** Comixology

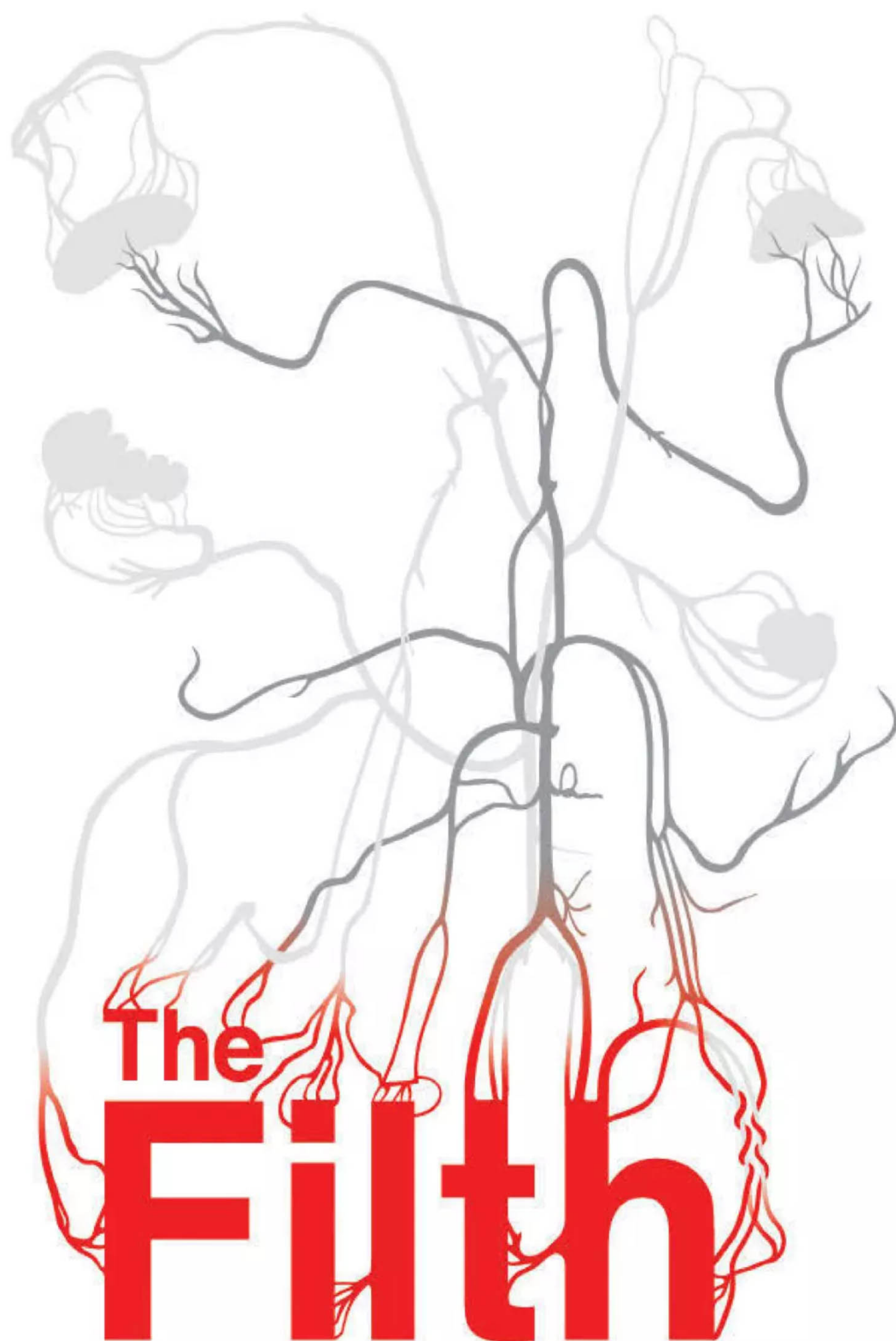
Many of the heroes in this volume have had their origin stories rebooted, rewritten or reconstituted out of pre-chewed chunks of terrible ideas, but few have endured/suffered it as frequently as DC's Big Blue.

Forget the *New 52* and try especially hard to forget Zack Snyder's *Man Of Steel*, as way back in 1986 writer, artist and *X-Men* alumni John Byrne rebuilt a cleaner New Testament around the inconsistent Old Testament of DC's Last Son of Krypton. While the trend around him moved toward nihilism and noir, Byrne proved that 'maturity' and 'hope' are by no means opposing forces.

While Frank Miller pulled the shutters down around Batman to show a world of one man alone against the night, Bryne revelled in Kal-El's place at the centre of his universe and tuned the high notes to a crystal-clear chime. He reinvented Lex Luthor as the callous corporate raider, Lana Lang as the wronged childhood sweetheart, and poor doomed Krypton a world of sterile super-science.

"BRYNE REVELLED IN KAL-EL'S PLACE AT THE CENTRE OF HIS UNIVERSE"





GRANT MORRISON CHRIS WESTON GARY ERSKINE

THE FILTH

Details Originally published The Filth #1-13 (2002-03) **Publisher** Vertigo
Writer Grant Morrison **Artist** Chris Weston **Collected in** The Filth
Available digitally Comixology, Kindle

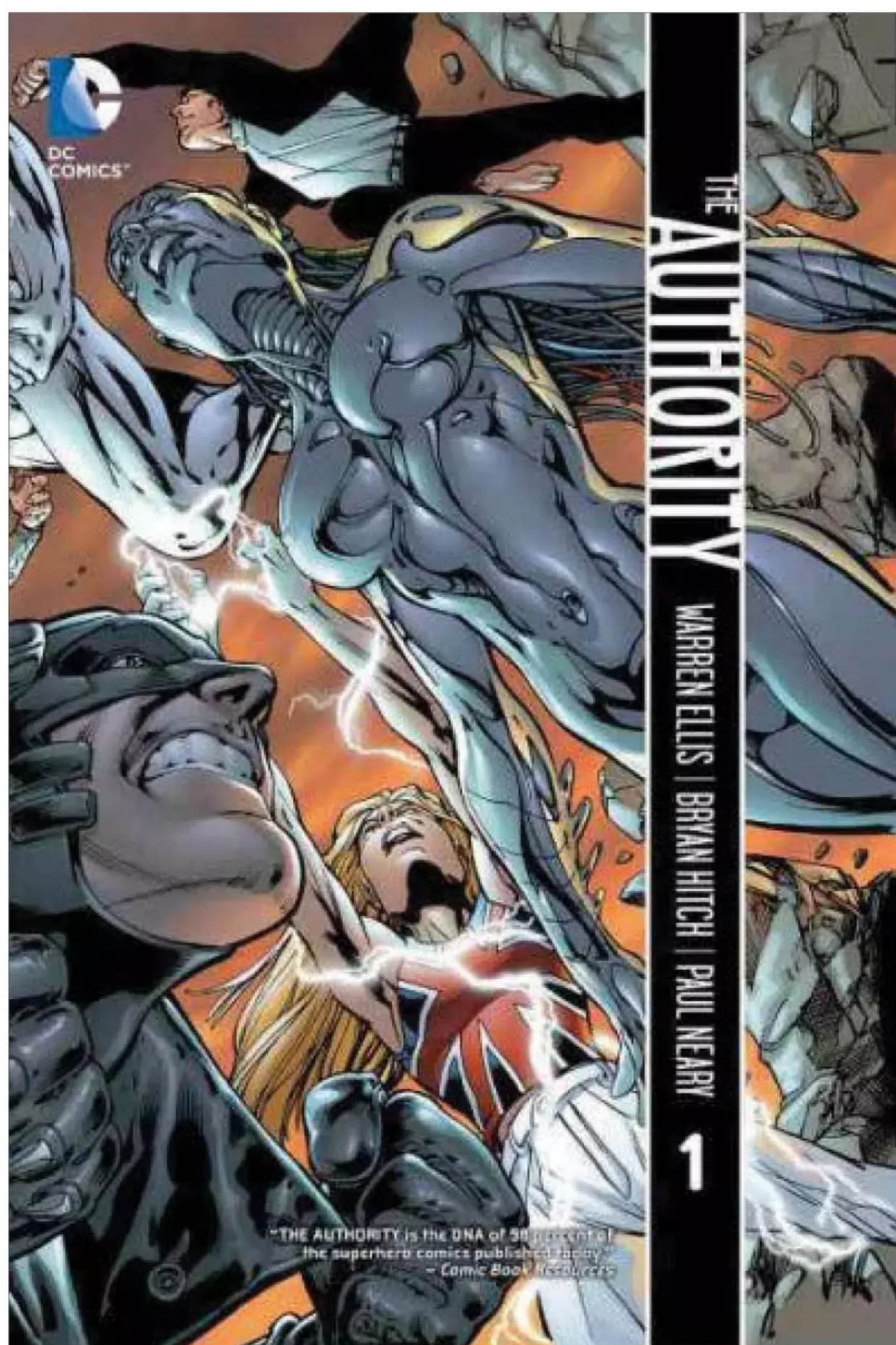
Published after Grant Morrison's epic *The Invisibles*, *The Filth* tells the dark and horrible story of Greg Feely, an aging single man whose main interests are his cat, Tony, and masturbating. Unknowingly, Feely is also a member of The Hand, a secret organisation who keep society en route to status quo. Intended as a sequel of sorts to *The Invisibles*, *The Filth* is a literal exploration of the Qliphoth or 'Tree of Death' – Morrison immersed himself in the dark and dingy, the pornographic and the perverse.

Fractal realities interplay in this title, with some fourth-wall shenanigans reminiscent of *Animal Man*, leading to some accusations of being too difficult to read or understand. Re-readings are required to fully grasp some of the concepts at hand. But not before breaking your heart into pieces.

It's one of Morrison's smartest works but be warned – *The Filth* is a health hazard.

"THE FILTH IS A HEALTH HAZARD"





THE AUTHORITY

Details Originally published The Authority #1-12 (1999) **Publisher** Wildstorm **Writer** Warren Ellis **Artists** Bryan Hitch, Paul Neary, Laura Depuy **Collected in** The Authority: Vol 1 **Available digitally** Comixology, Kindle

Springing from the ruins of Warren Ellis' *Stormwatch* run (also essential, by the way), this run effortlessly balanced colossal ideas and spectacle with moments of real character. The grin of total, abject joy on the Engineer's face when she walks on the Moon is still a great moment, and the entire series is crammed full of moments like that.

Every single book that followed this run, including a good chunk of future *Authority* runs, failed miserably. That's because they forgot those character moments. Without them this is empty, even cruel spectacle. With them, this is three stories about hope and what happens when people are braver than they think they can be. The scale is huge; cities fall, thousands die, and we see it all in loving detail thanks to Bryan Hitch, Paul Neary and Laura Depuy. But it's the character moments that make the book shine and give it its spot on this list.



INVINCIBLE: PERFECT STRANGERS

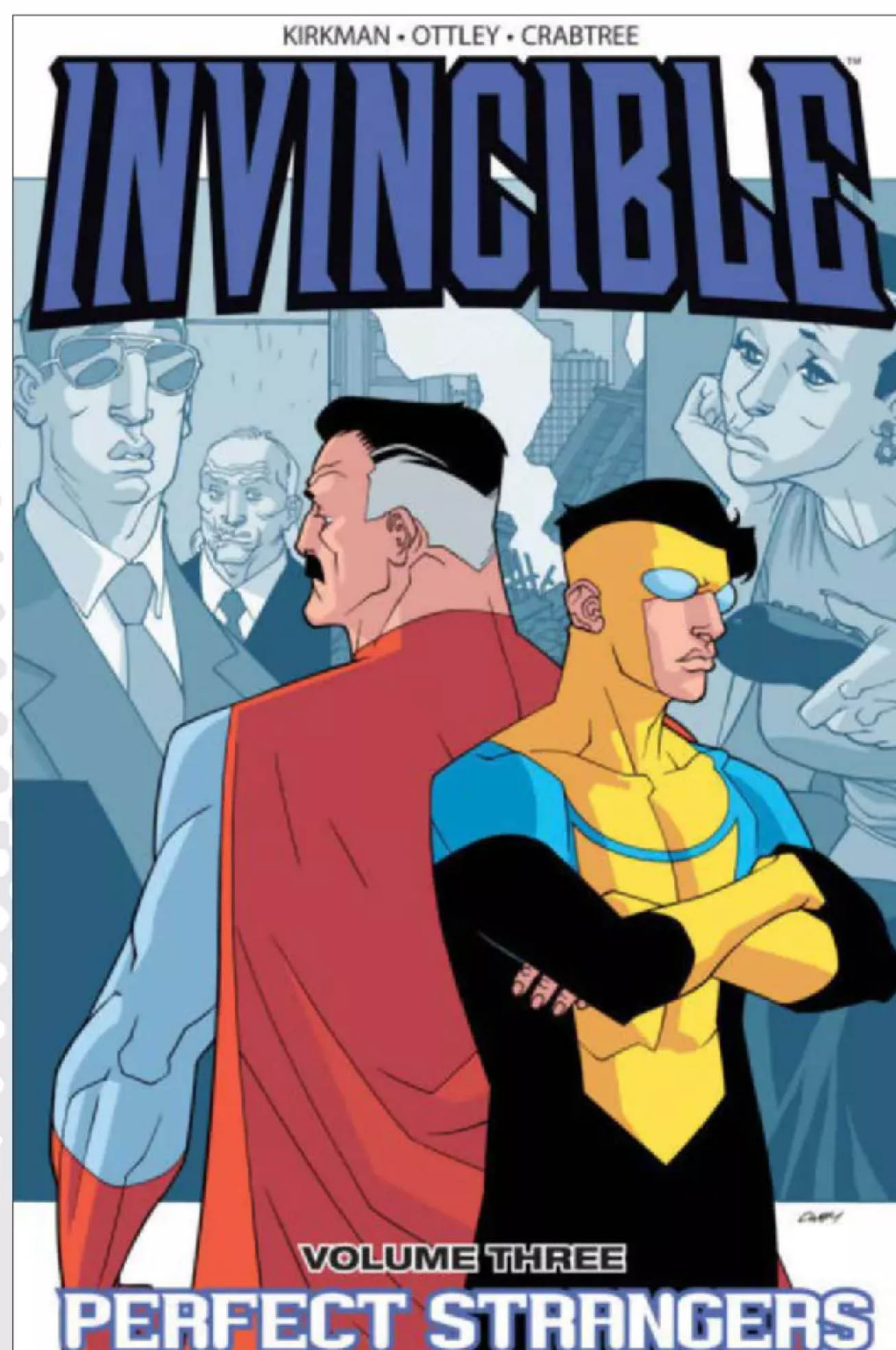
Details Originally published Invincible #9-13 (2004) **Publisher** Icon **Writer** Robert Kirkman **Artist** Cory Walker and Bill Crabtree **Collected in** Invincible Volume 3: Perfect Strangers **Available digitally** Kindle, Comixology

Proving that there's more to Robert Kirkman than the unrelenting misery of *The Walking Dead*, *Invincible* – with the bold art of Cory Walker and Bill Crabtree – was effectively the best *Spider-Man* comic that Joss Whedon never wrote, following teen titan Mark Grayson as he learned to balance the legacy of his Superman-like father Omni-Man with the usual school/bullies/dating worries of the trainee hero.



Smart, fast-paced and bouncier than a puppy in a tumble dryer, the series' third arc capped off the origin story with a devastating escalation, tearing the status quo limb from limb and subjecting this post-modern mash-up of Silver Age tropes to the sort of shock and awe that has made Kirkman's zombie apocalypse such a hit.

Perfect Strangers (each arc is named after a sitcom, which gives you a good idea of what you're dealing with) marked the point where *Invincible* went from being the comic equivalent of a Saturday morning cartoon to full-blown box-set obsession.





WOLVERINE: OLD MAN LOGAN

Details Originally published Wolverine #66-72 (2008-09) **Publisher** Marvel
Writer Mark Millar **Artist** Steve McNiven **Collected in** Wolverine: Old Man Logan
Available digitally Comixology, Marvel Unlimited

Old Man Logan is a fantastic entry-point story not only for Wolverine, but for the Marvel universe as a whole.

The setting – some 50 years in the future – necessitates no prior knowledge being required, as we open in a dystopian United States that has been conquered and divided up among the surviving supervillains.

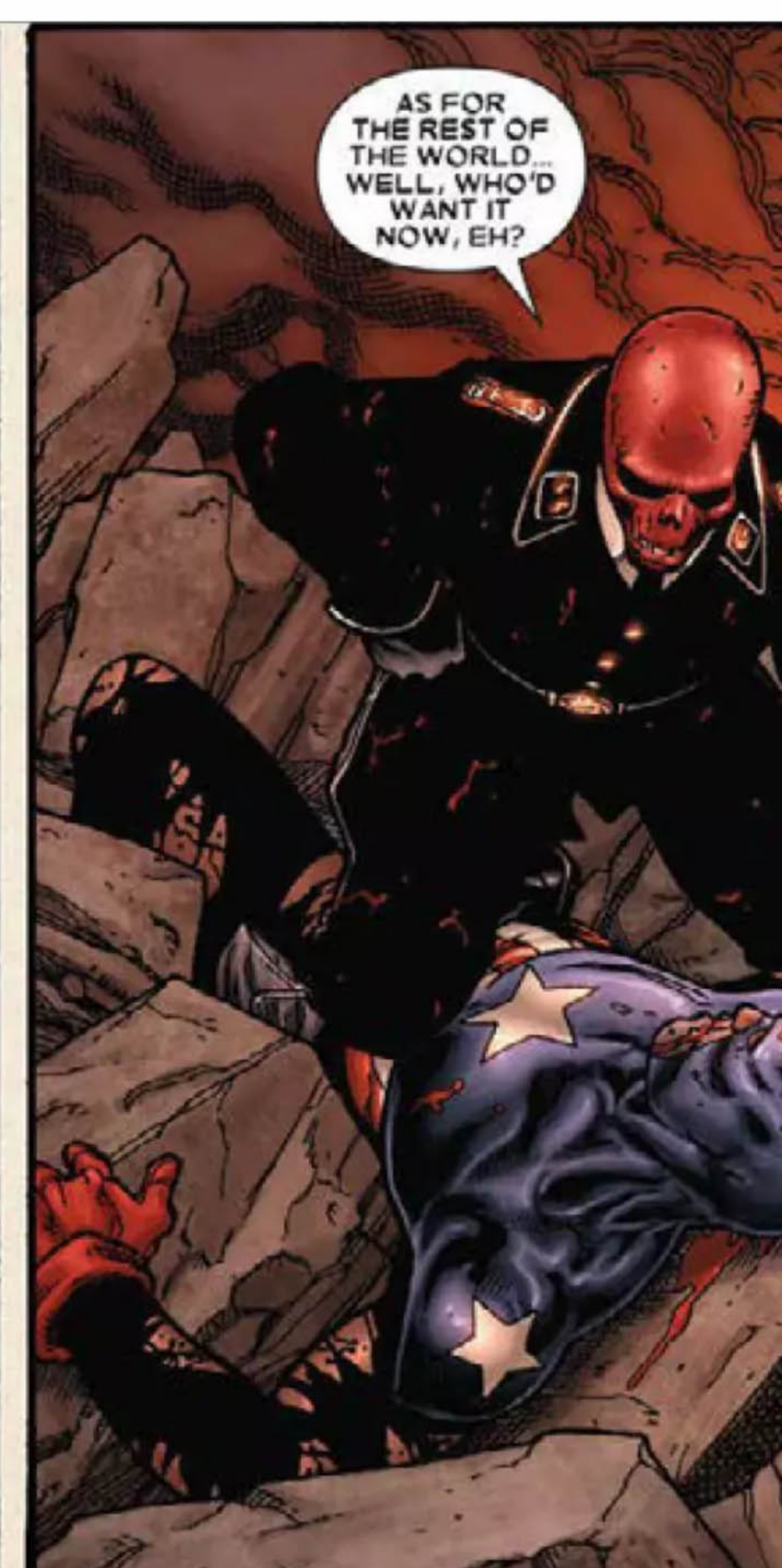
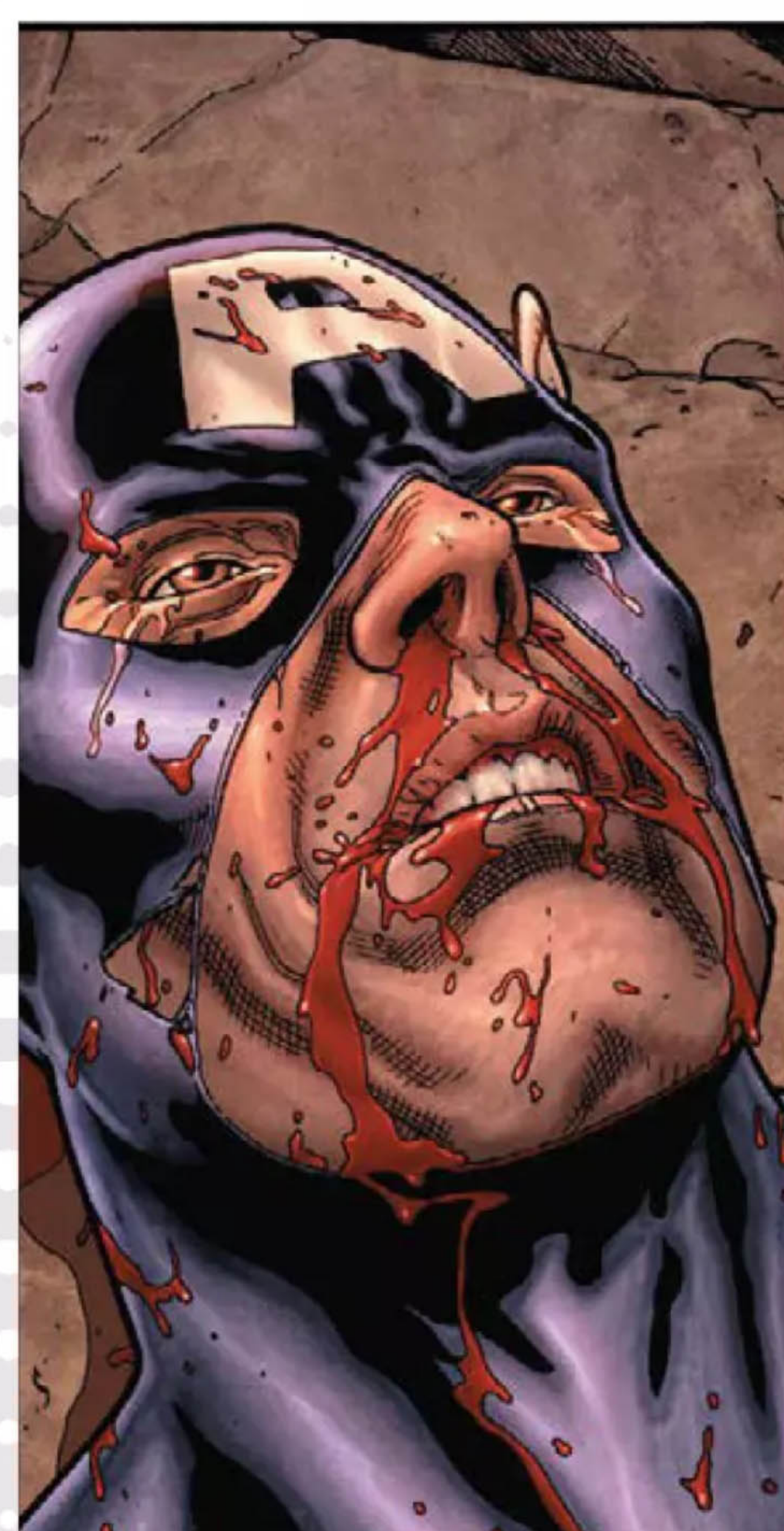
Logan, living with his wife and kids in the area known as Hulkland, has refused to pop his claws since the day the villains attacked, but needing money he agrees to accompany a now blind Hawkeye on what he thinks is a drugs delivery. Journeying across the villainous US, the ex-heroes aim for the capital, run by the Red Skull.

The future is bleak, and the Wolverine long retired, but of course everything is just about to change.

It's a dark story and well told, if unsurprisingly over the top, and this is violent grit at its best. Steve McNiven delivers some of the best art of his career thus far in a title that is surprisingly overlooked, we'd recommend that you add *Old Man Logan* to your library effect of immediately.



"THIS IS
VIOLENT GRIT
AT ITS BEST"



BATMAN

THE DARK KNIGHT RETURNS

BY
FRANK MILLER
WITH
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AND
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THE DARK KNIGHT RETURNS

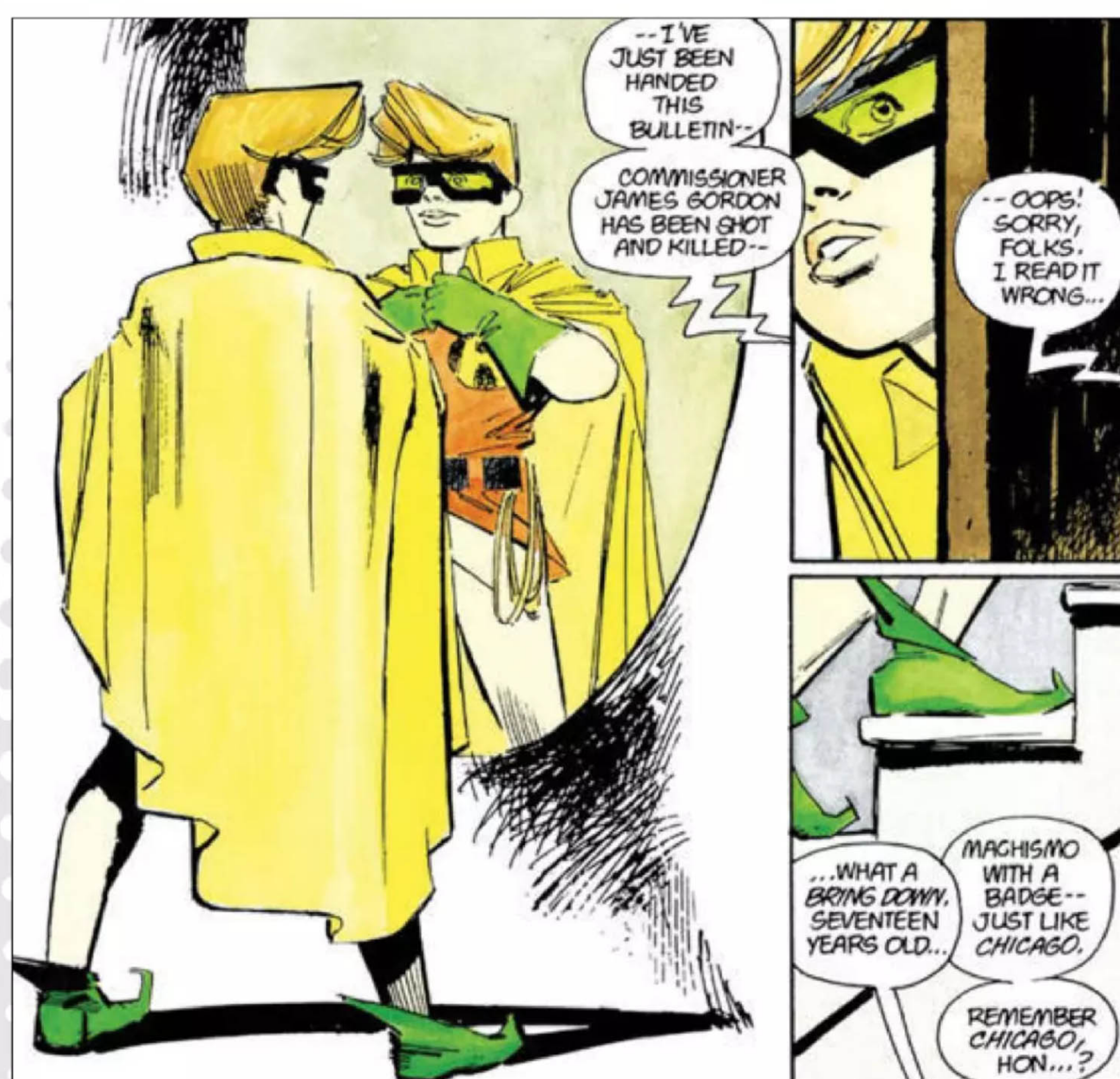
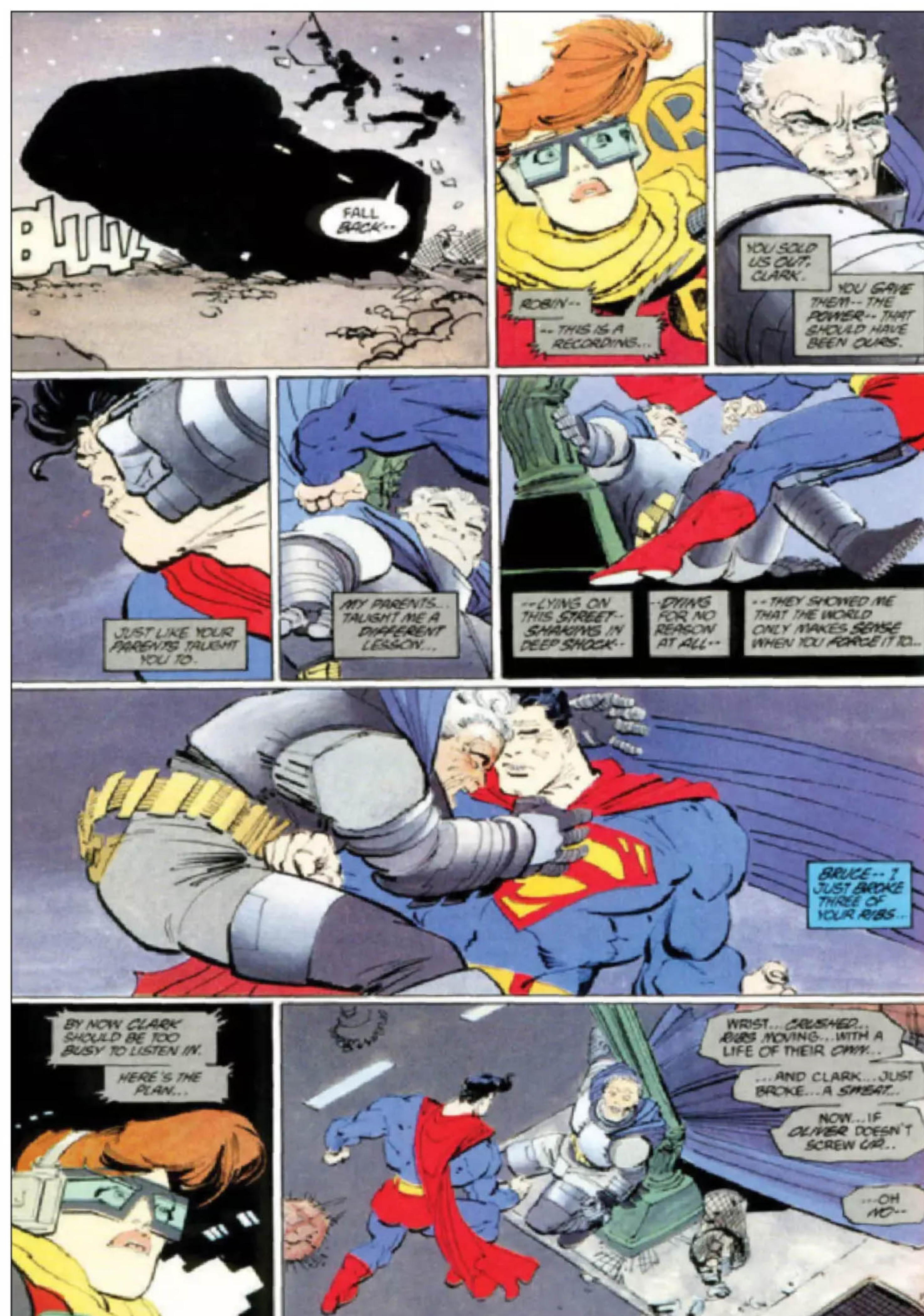
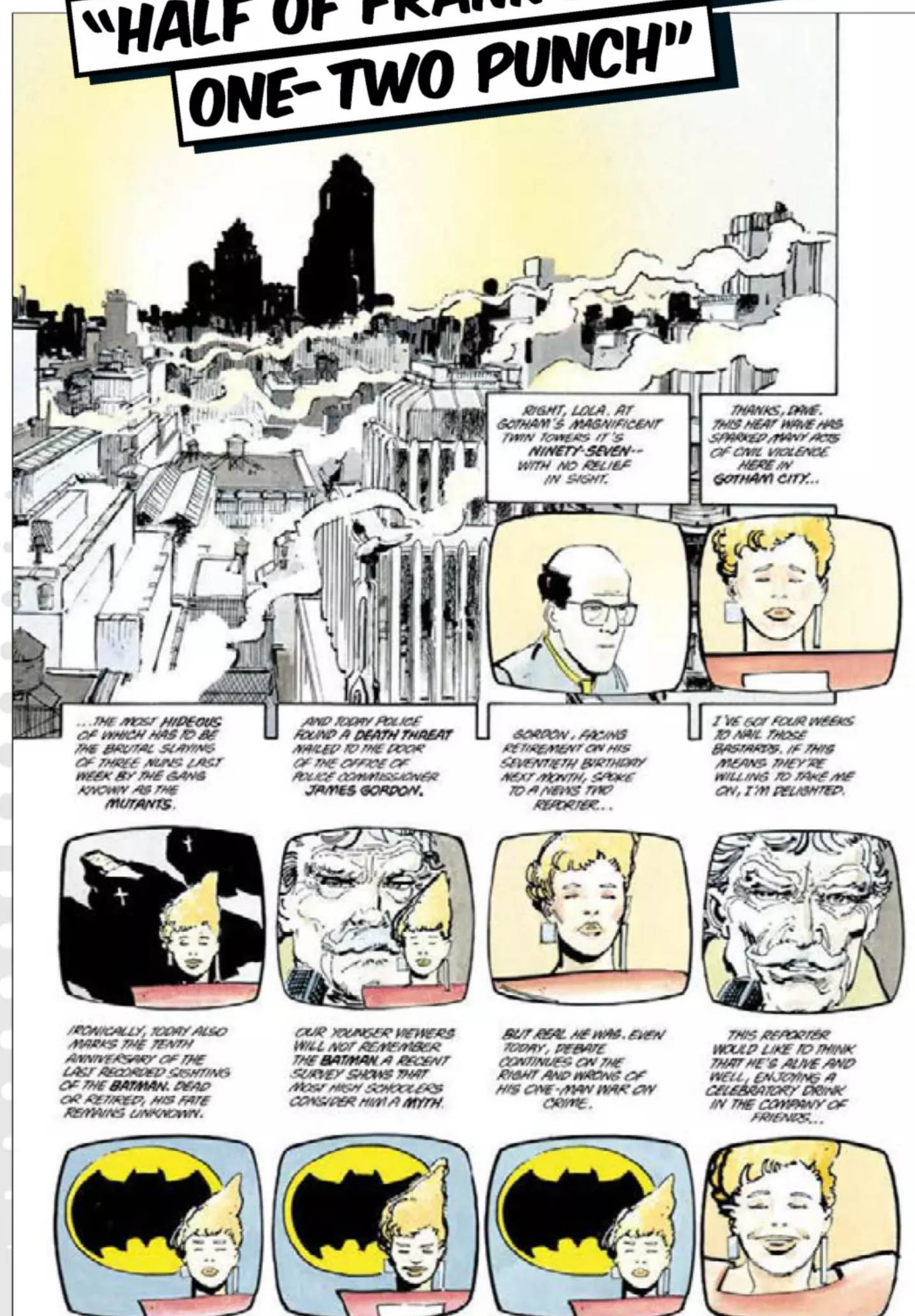
Details Originally published The Dark Knight Returns #1-#4 (1986) **Publisher** DC Comics
Writer Frank Miller **Artist** Frank Miller, Klaus Janson **Collected in** The Dark Knight Returns (£14.99)
Available digitally Kindle, Comixology

It's rare that a book set outside of current continuity can have such an impact on its source material. But *The Dark Knight Returns* – alongside *Year One* – is half of Frank Miller's one-two punch that changed Batman forever.

Miller takes advantage of Batman's age and casts him in the rare role of underdog, pitting him against young upstarts, old villains, the police and – in the book's most memorable moments – Superman himself. He might be old, he might have an untested Robin, and he might not hold Gotham's criminals in a state of terror anymore, but he's still the Goddamn Batman.

The bulky, ugly art gives the whole thing a post-apocalyptic feel, the grimy look of a world without Batman, and Superman is treated with a rare lack of respect. But that's hardly surprising when the book's loyalties rest squarely with one character – and it's not the one in primary colours.

"HALF OF FRANK MILLER'S ONE-TWO PUNCH"



MARVELS

Details Originally published Marvels #0-4.2 (1994) **Publisher** Marvel

Writer Kurt Busiek **Artist** Alex Ross **Collected in** Marvels

Available digitally Comixology

Although it's often hailed for its chronicle of the Marvel Universe, what truly makes *Marvels* stand out is its celebration of what makes comics great.

Kurt Busiek's ability to analyse the dynamic between superheroes and ordinary society without reverting to cynicism gives us a thoughtful and heartfelt take on Marvel's narrative history. Through the viewpoint of photographer Phil Sheldon, we see the stress that living among constant superhuman conflict and destruction places on everyday people, as well as the awe that these larger-than-life figures inspire.

Ross's photorealistic images of a colossal Galactus hovering over a city where cars and buildings look like toys or a silent Spider-Man crawling insect-like up a wall make the characters seem inhuman, even godlike.

They remind us that reading comics places us among creatures of modern myth, which should never be taken for granted – but rather, should be marvelled at.



**"READING COMICS PLACES US
AMONG CREATURES OF MODERN MYTH"**



GRANT MORRISON
FRANK QUITELY

Deluxe Edition

"Startling, disturbing and perhaps enlightening...
A provocative tale."
— *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*

"Realistic and relevant."
— *The Washington Post*

WE3

Details Originally published We3 #1-3 (2004-05) **Publisher** Vertigo

Writer Grant Morrison **Artist** Frank Quitely **Collected in** We3 Deluxe

Edition Available digitally Comixology, Kindle

Famous for the kinetic ground-breaking art by Frank Quitely, *We3* was recently re-released in a luxurious deluxe edition, complete with all new pages. But beware; this is a book that is truly impossible to read without breaking down in ugly sobs of tears.

We3 are a squad of three prototype 'animal weapons' who escape their facility to live in freedom. Bandit the dog, Tinker the cat and Pirate the rabbit were all kidnapped from their homes and encased in weaponised armour, complete with a skull implant that lets them speak limited English.

It's a little like the film *Homeward Bound*, except that it will leave you with a deep feeling that humanity is evil – and remind you that animal experimentations for souls like these are the norm. There have been numerous film adaptations attempted, but writer Grant Morrison insists it will only be done if it can be done well.

**"IMPOSSIBLE TO READ
WITHOUT BREAKING
DOWN IN TEARS"**



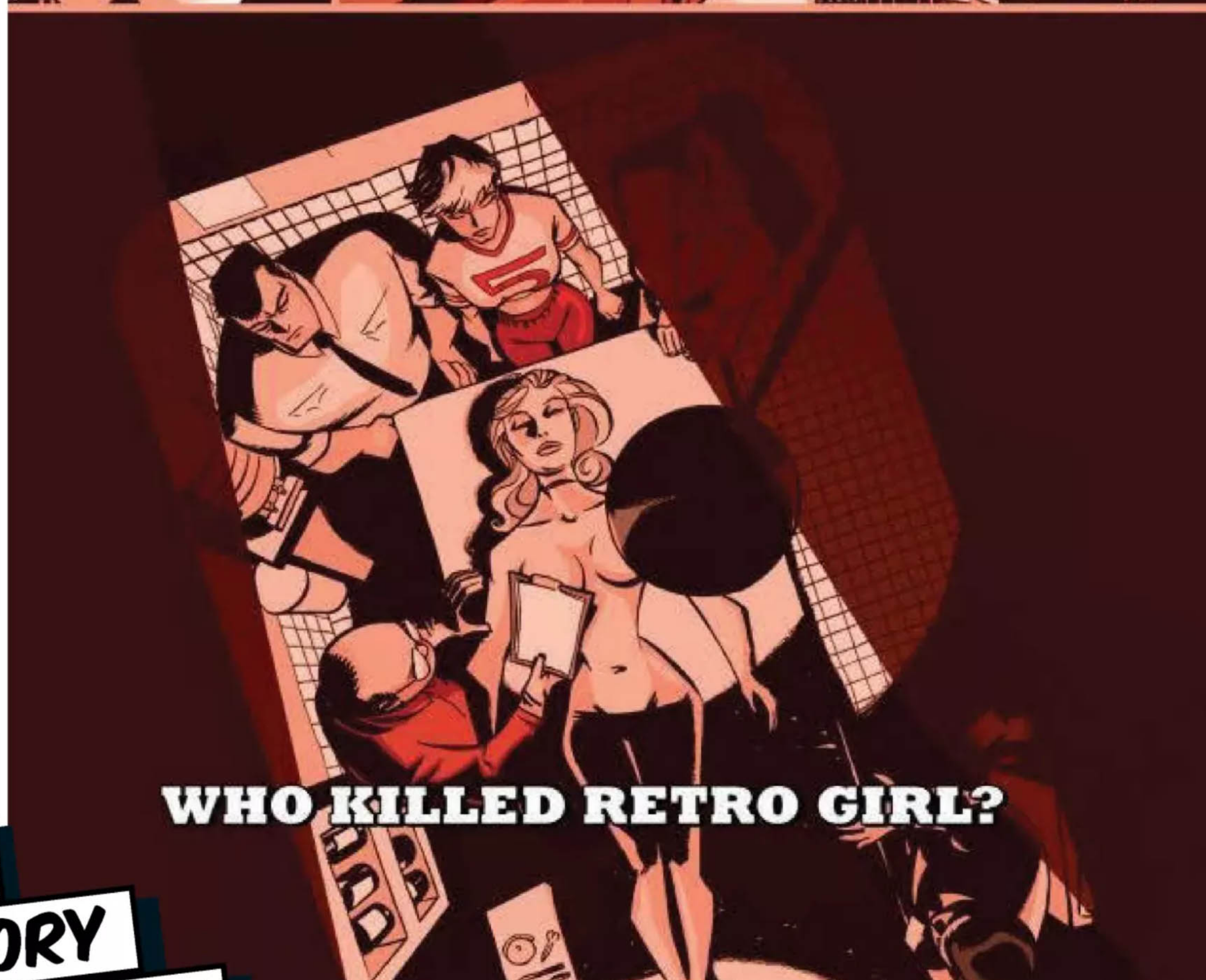
POWERS: WHO KILLED RETRO GIRL?

He's Christian Walker, the only cop Powers will trust! She's Deena Pilgrim, a transfer from SWAT with a bad attitude and a smart mouth! They fight crime!

And so, so much more. Brian Michael Bendis and Michael Avon Oeming's magnum opus is both superhero history lesson and cop show. Bendis writes dialogue like no one on Earth, and he cuts loose here, especially with the delightfully gobby Pilgrim. It's Oeming's art that leaves a mark though; Walker is a slab of a man, larger than life and still broken by it, living in a world of bright, gaudy nightmares.

Walker and Pilgrim's attitude towards superhumans is coloured by their job, and Bendis uses to examine the idea of the superhuman from every angle.

The entire series is great but if you read nothing else, read the first volume, *Who Killed Retro Girl?* It's the best pilot episode in comic form ever.



"THEIR MAGNUM OPUS IS BOTH SUPERHERO HISTORY LESSON AND COP SHOW"





KICK-ASS

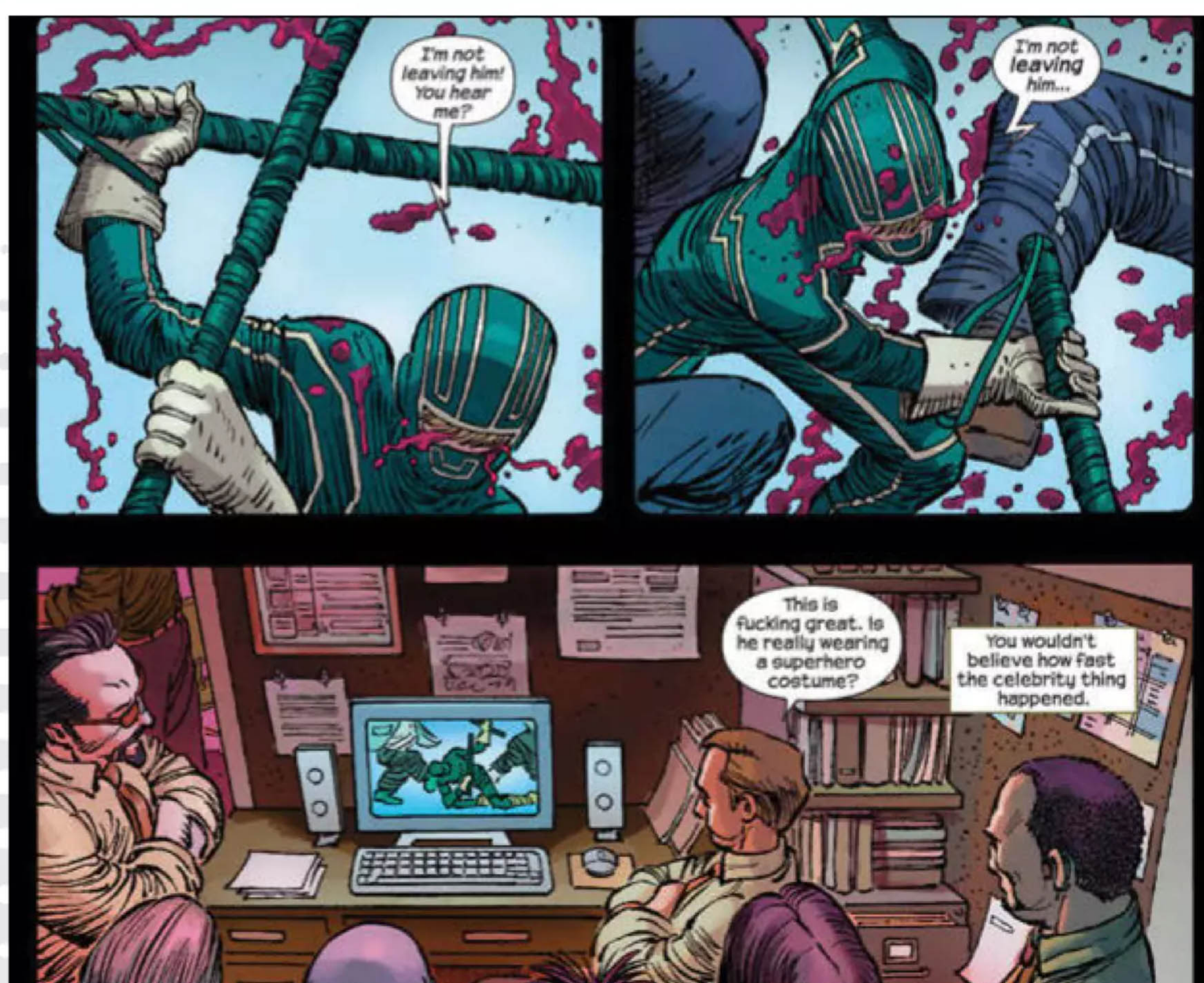
Details Originally published Kick-Ass #1-8 (2008-10) **Publisher** Icon
Writer Mark Millar **Artist** John Romita Jr **Collected in** Kick-Ass
Available digitally Comixology

Superheroes have been brushing up against real world values a lot longer than most people think – that was the secret ingredient of Marvel’s Silver Age rise after all, but it took arch shock-master Mark Millar and the bloody-knuckled lines of John Romita Jr to really bring the theme home with a window-shattering bang.

The ultra-violent and ultra-sweary *Kick-Ass* was a revolution as profane as it was profound as gangly geek Dave Lizewski pulls on a ski-mask to clean up the streets.

The (also good) film takes a swerve away from wicked satire and into sincere superheroics, but in the comic Dave’s confession to Katie Deauxma that he’s only pretending to be gay to get close to her goes exactly the way it should. She doesn’t embrace him while music swells as she does in the film; she has her boyfriend kick the shit out of him.

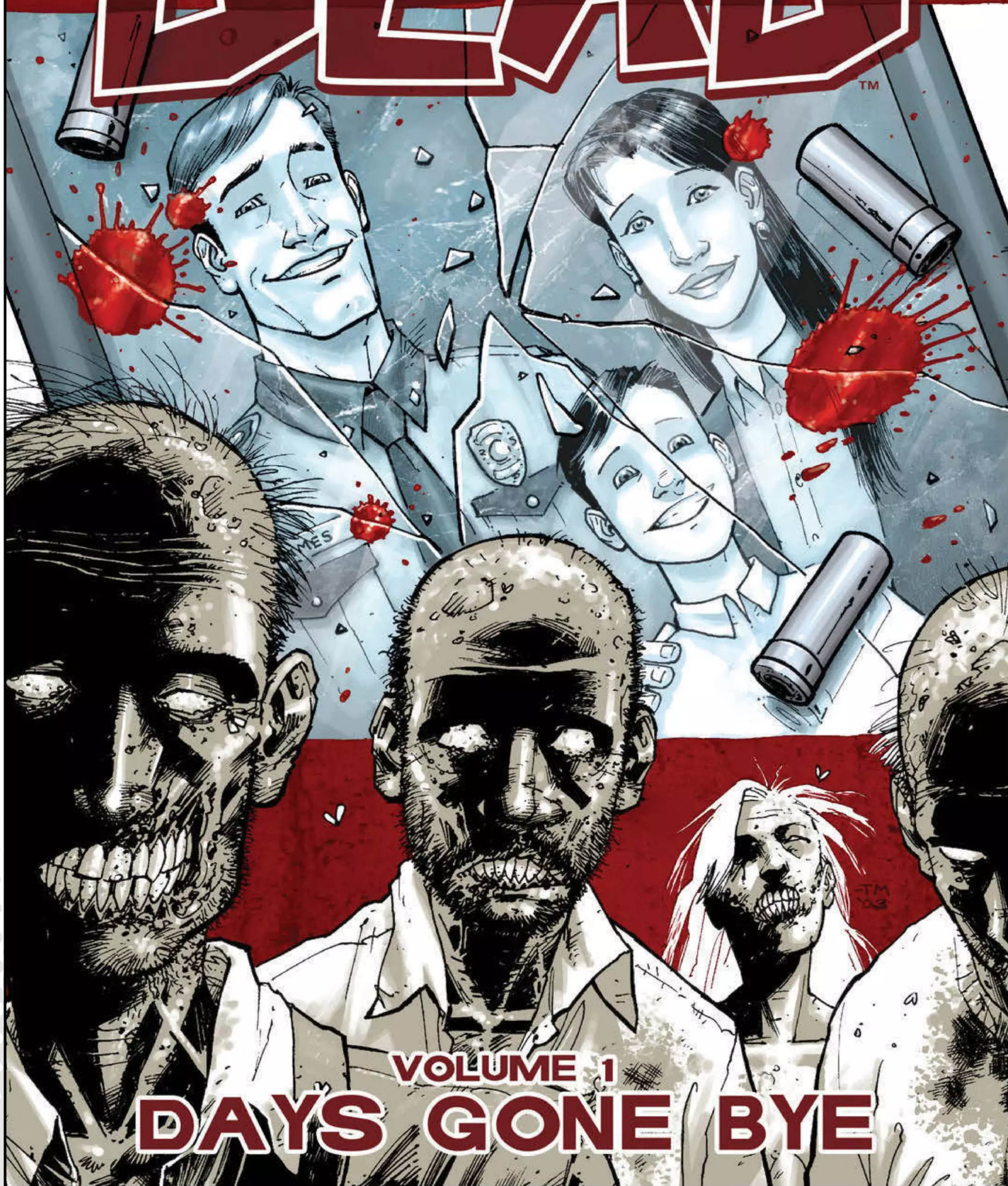
The real world sucks.



ROBERT KIRKMAN TONY MOORE

Greatest Comics

THE WALKING DEAD



THE WALKING DEAD: DAYS GONE BYE

Details Originally published The Walking Dead #1-6 (2004) **Publisher** Image **Writer** Robert Kirkman
Artist Tony Moore **Collected in** The Walking Dead: Vol 1 – Days Gone Bye **Available digitally** Comixology

Does this even need an introduction? *The Walking Dead* is one of the biggest properties in popular culture thanks to the AMC TV show. But it all began with Robert Kirkman, a pen, paper, and the words 'Page One, Panel One'.

The world is in ruin after the dead rise from their graves and begin to feed on the living. There is no government, no society and, worst of all, no more releases from us detailing the 100 essential comic books. *The Walking Dead* found success by pulling focus away from the living dead and onto a group of survivors willing to do anything to survive. *Days Gone Bye* is essential reading – you shouldn't skip ahead, but the series continues to escalate. Humanity is its own worst enemy, and *The Walking Dead* never ceases to surprise, shock and amaze. Surrender your money – once you start reading, you'll be hooked for life (or until Kirkman stops writing them, whichever comes first).



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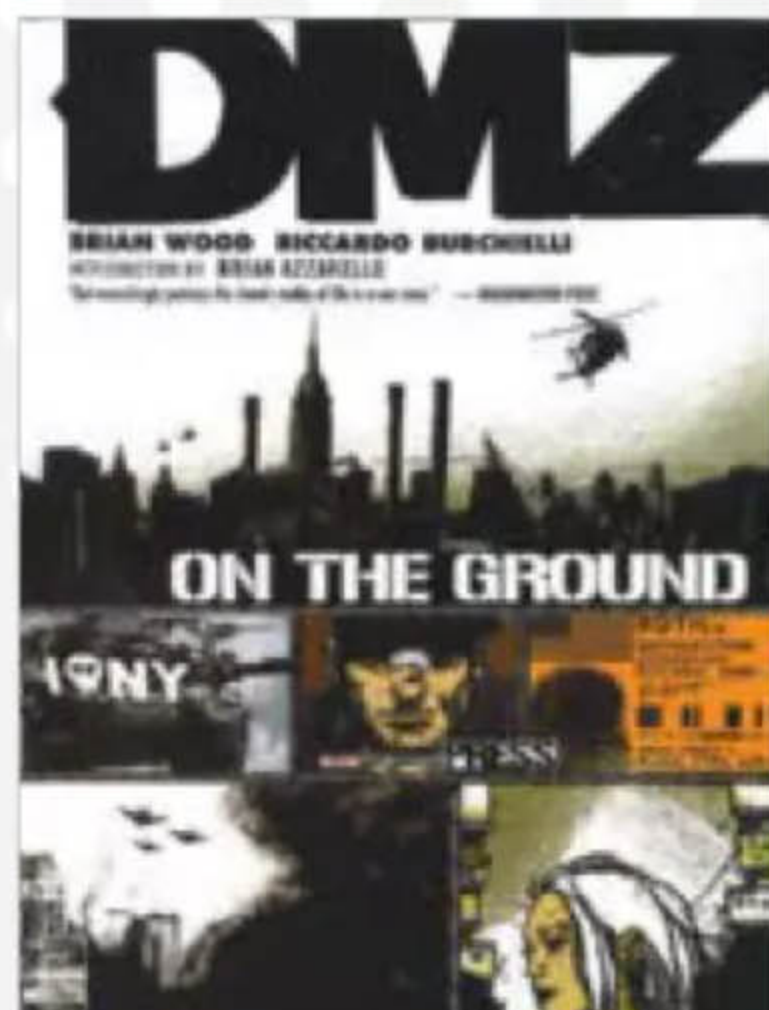
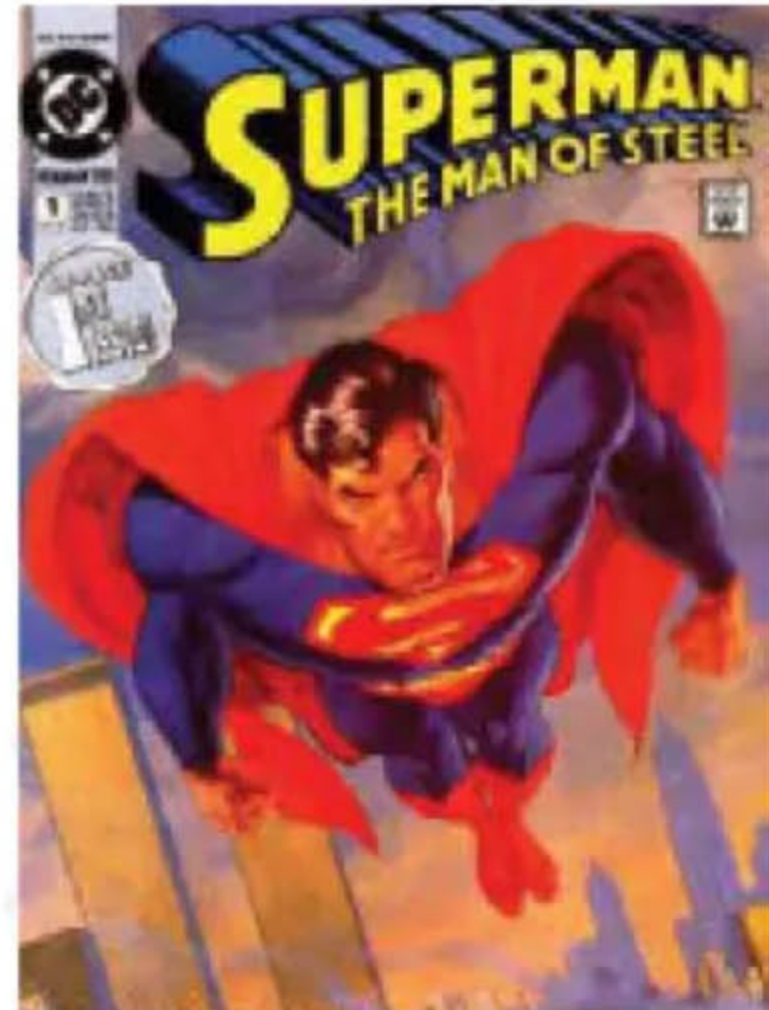
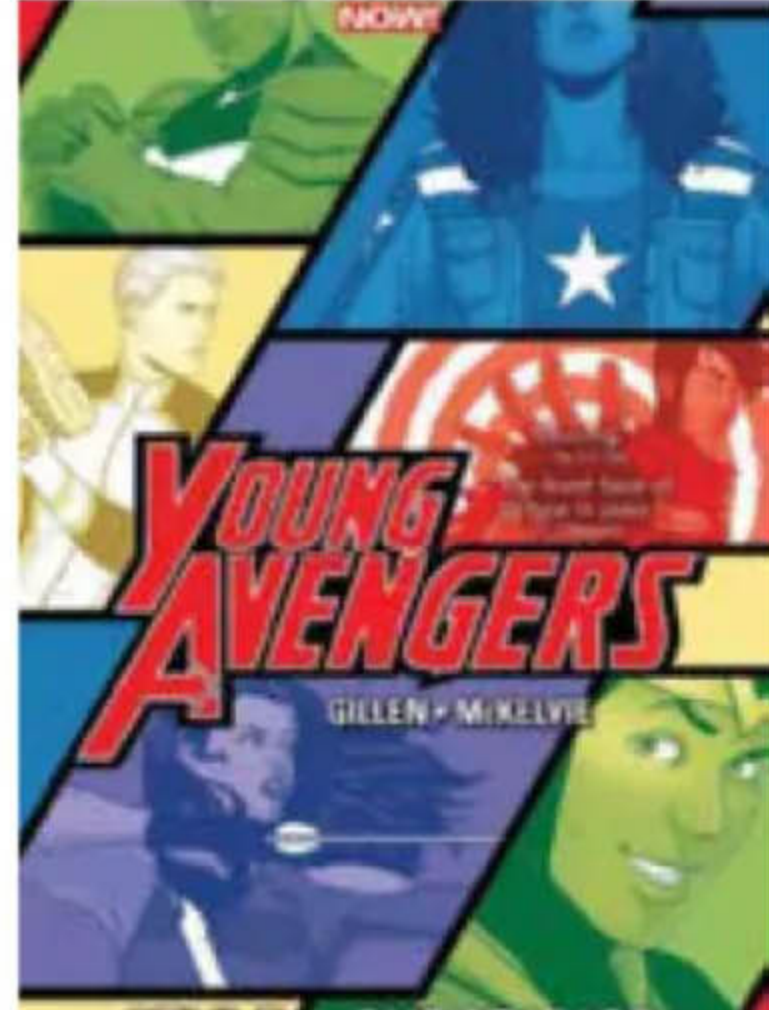
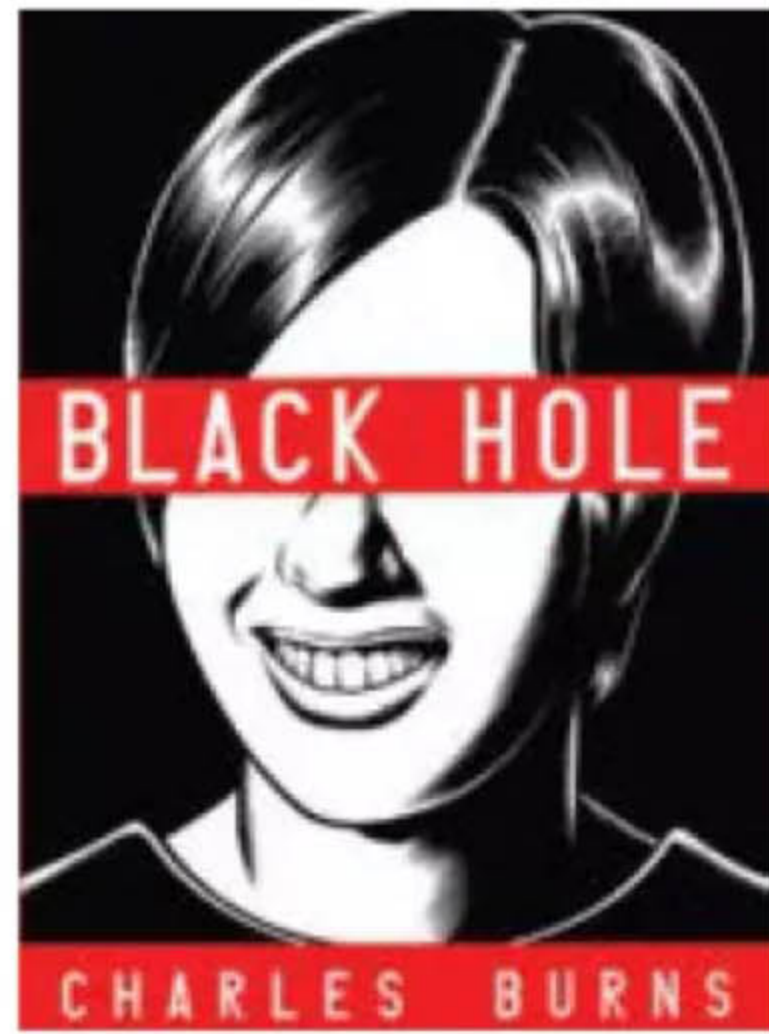
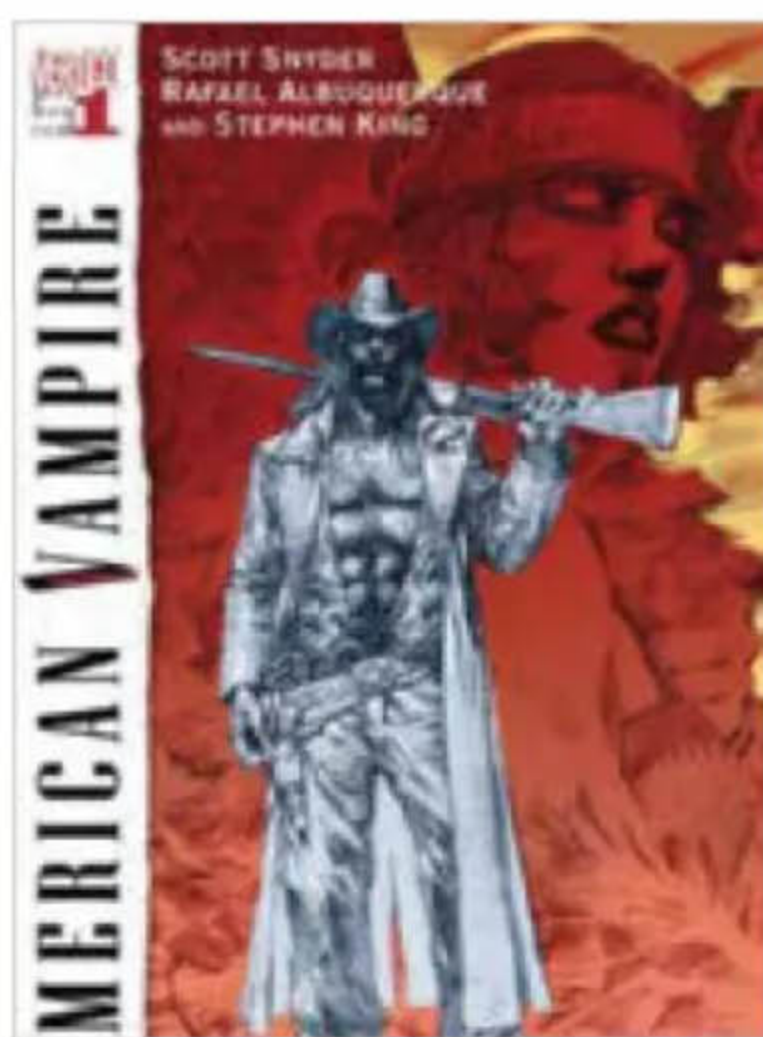
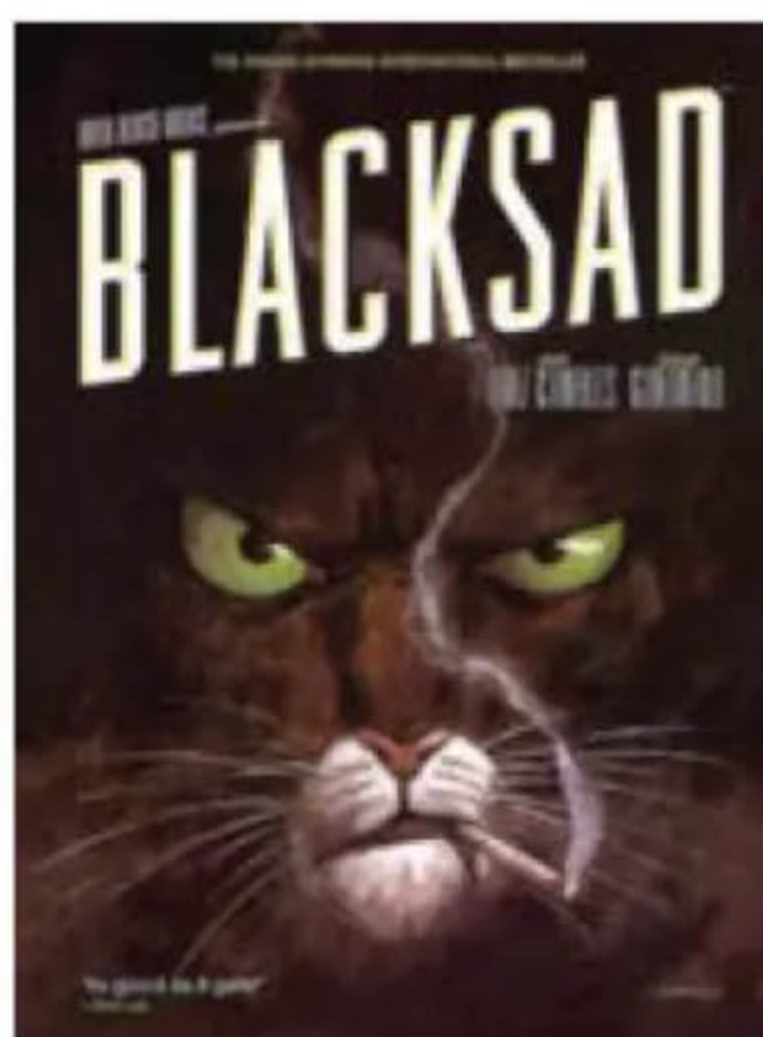
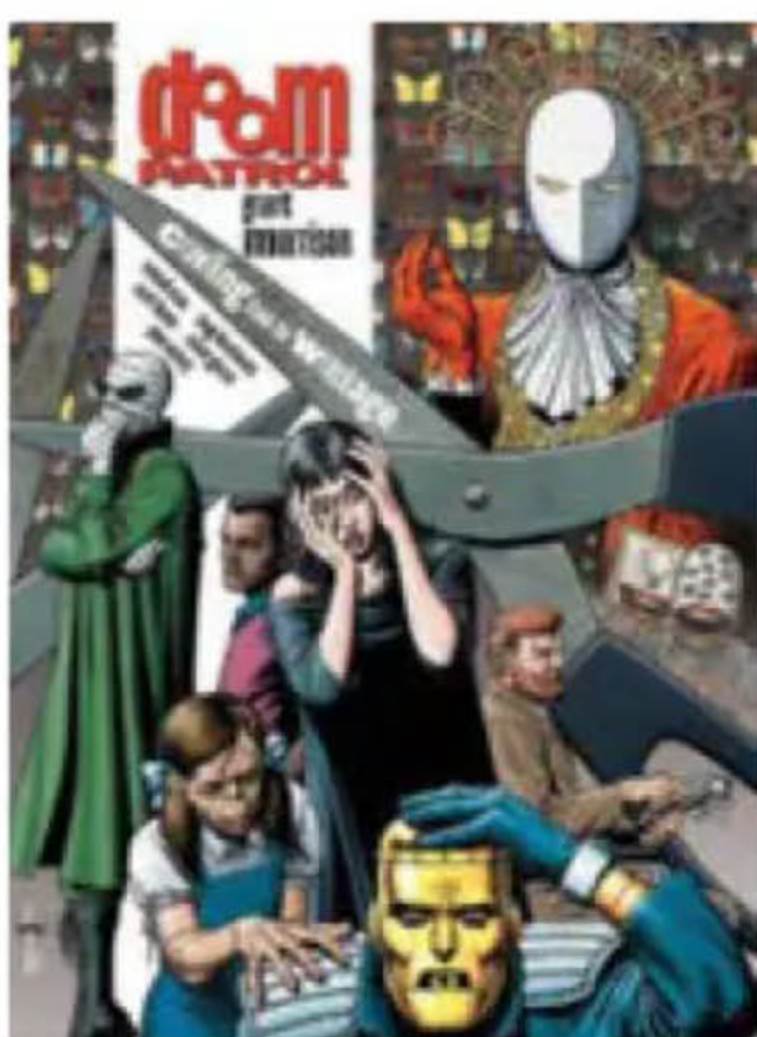
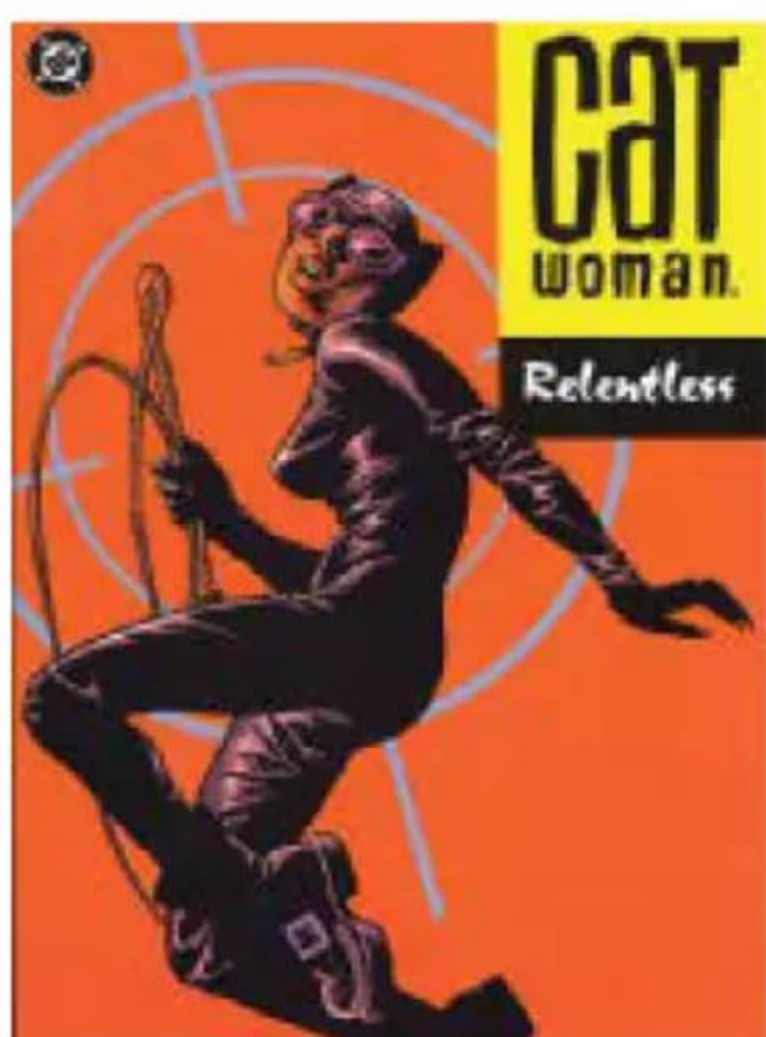
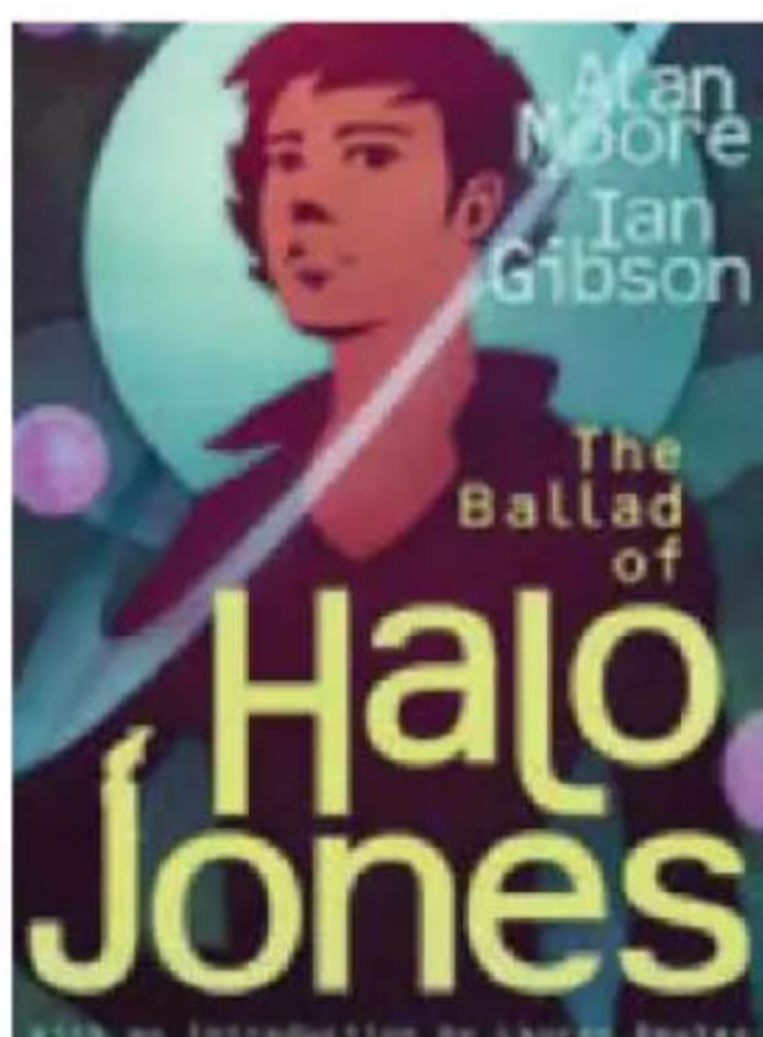
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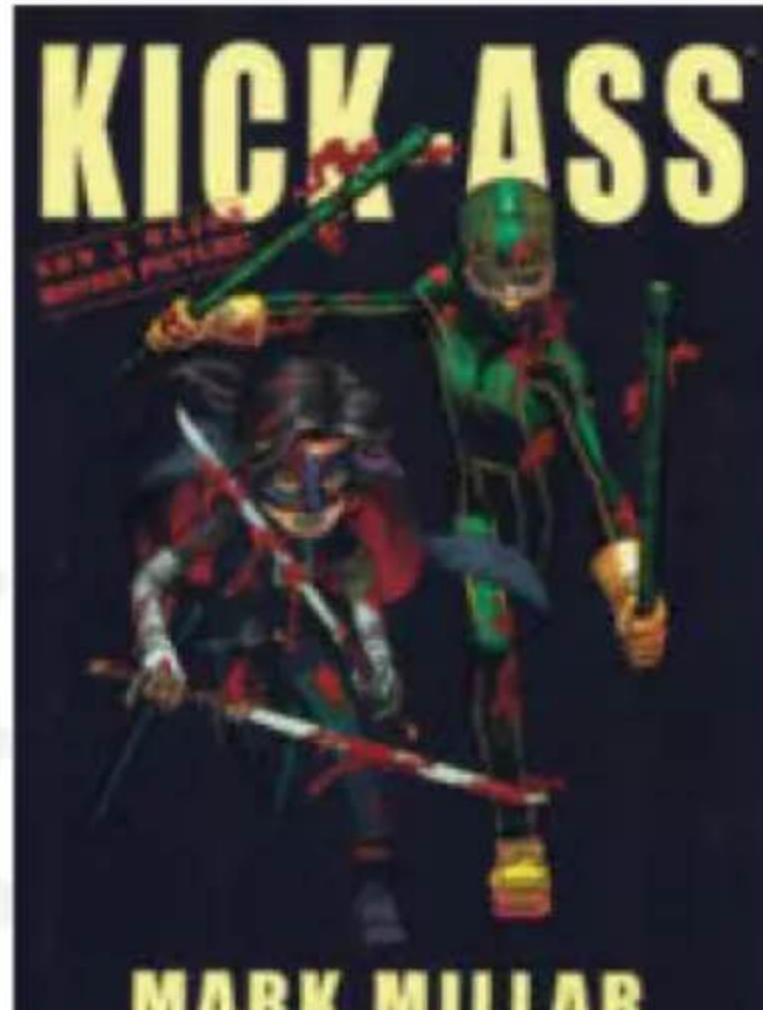
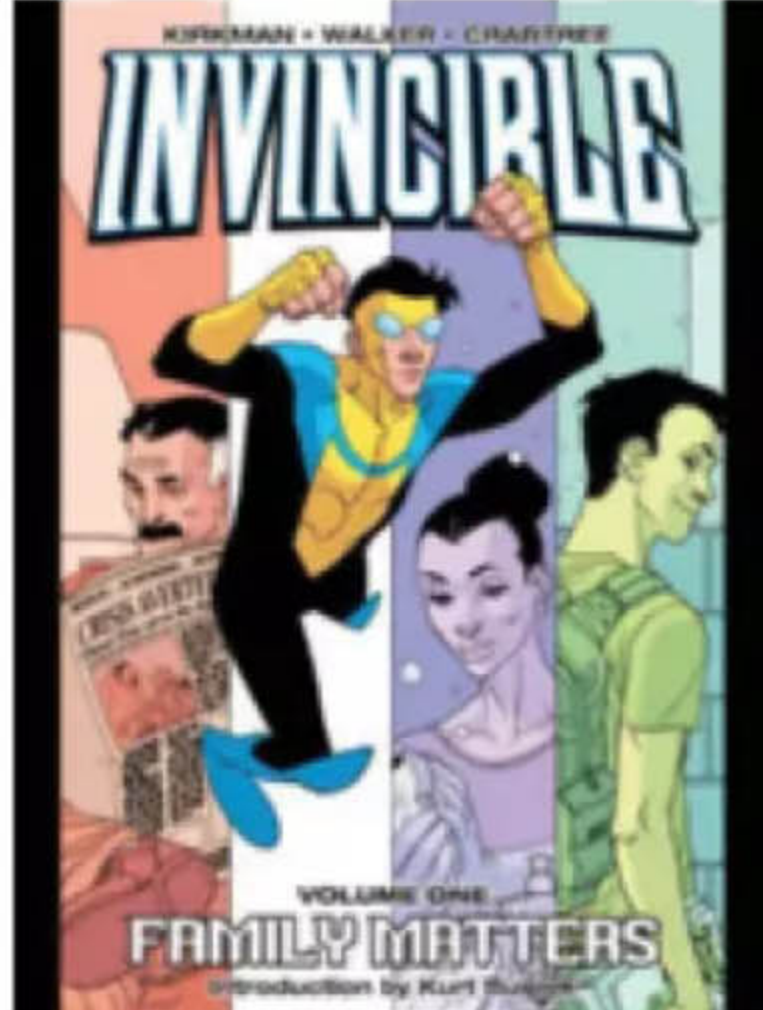
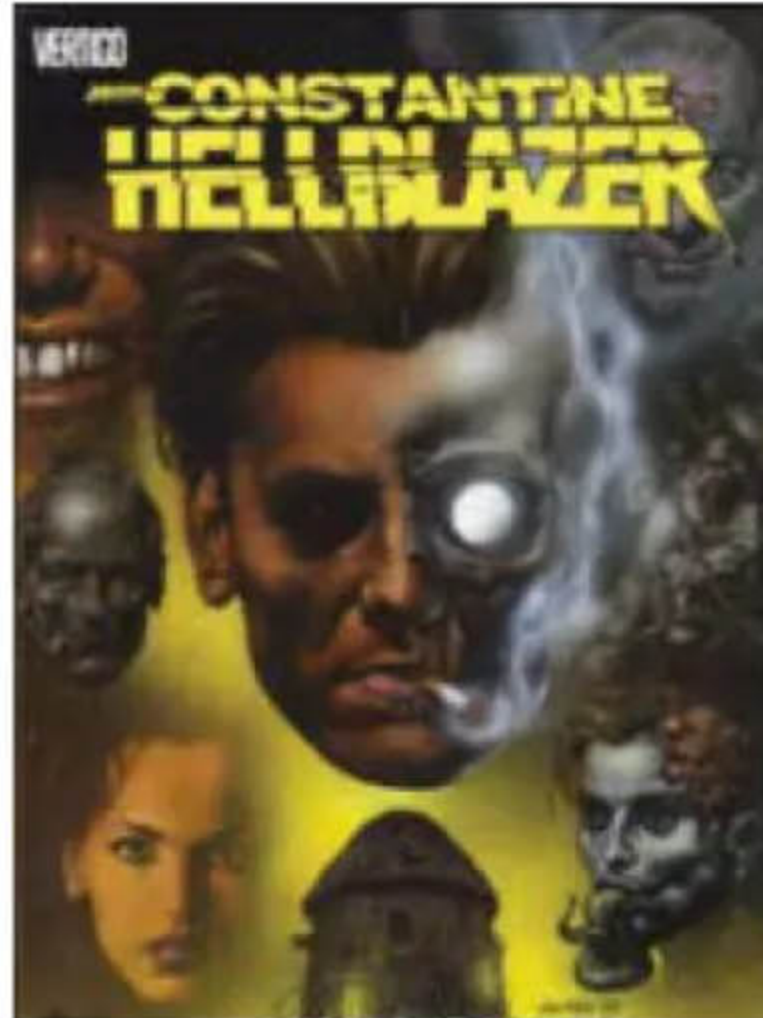
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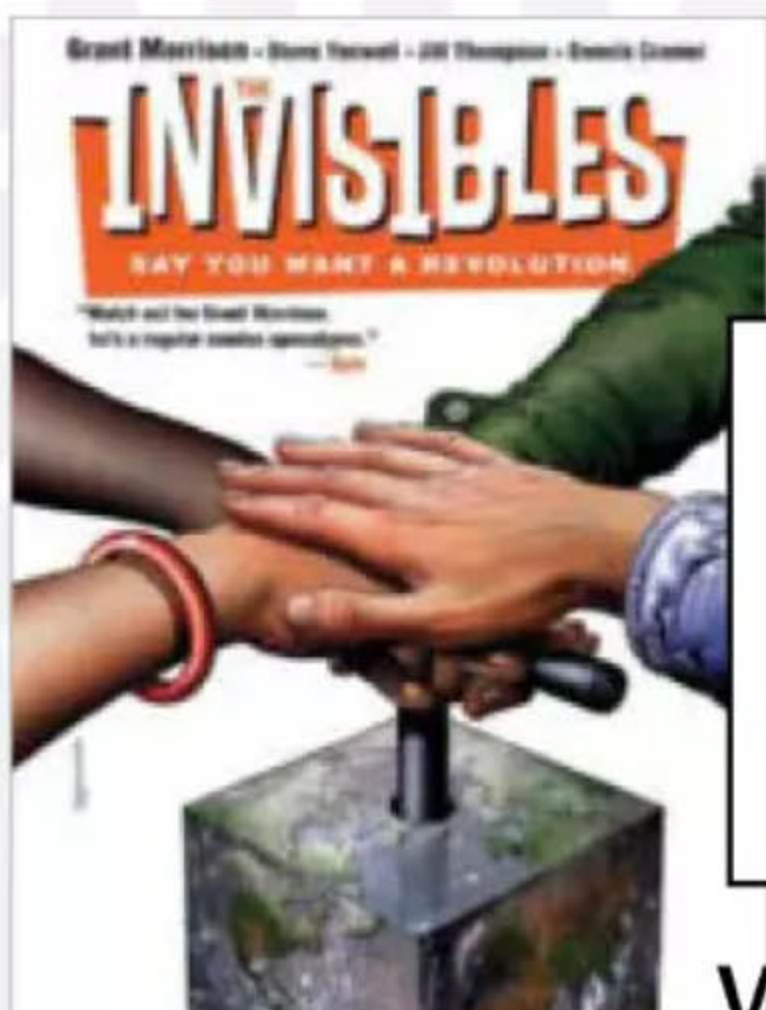
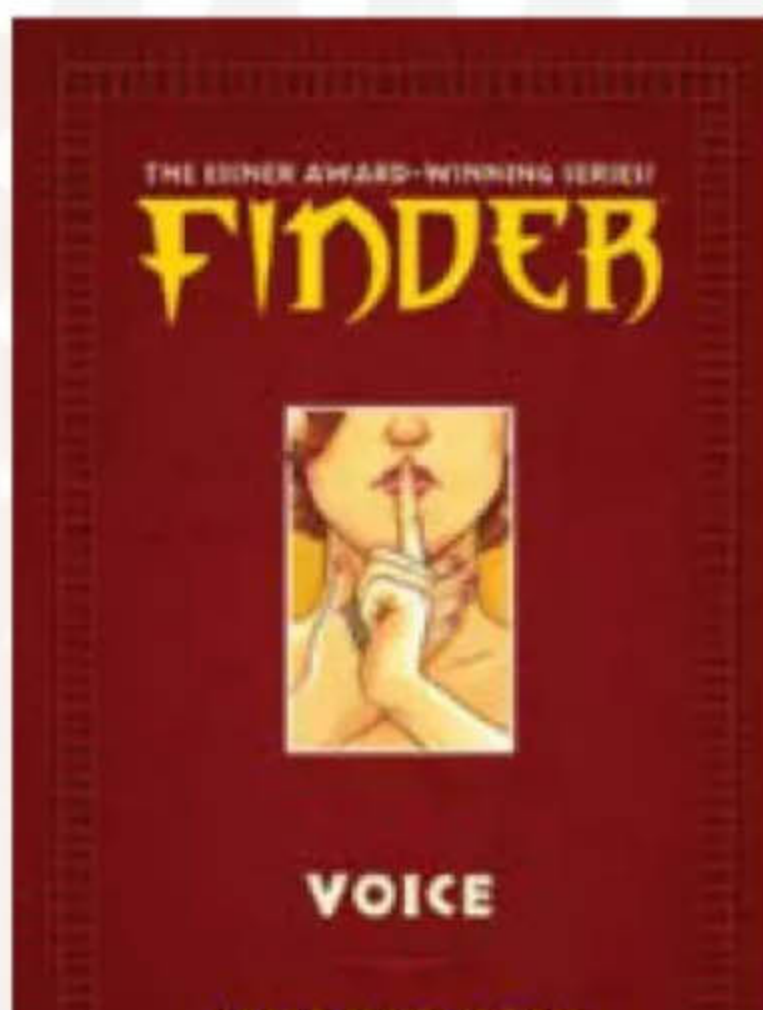
Breaking into comic books

Find out the story of how Kieron Gillen found his home in writing the graphic novel



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